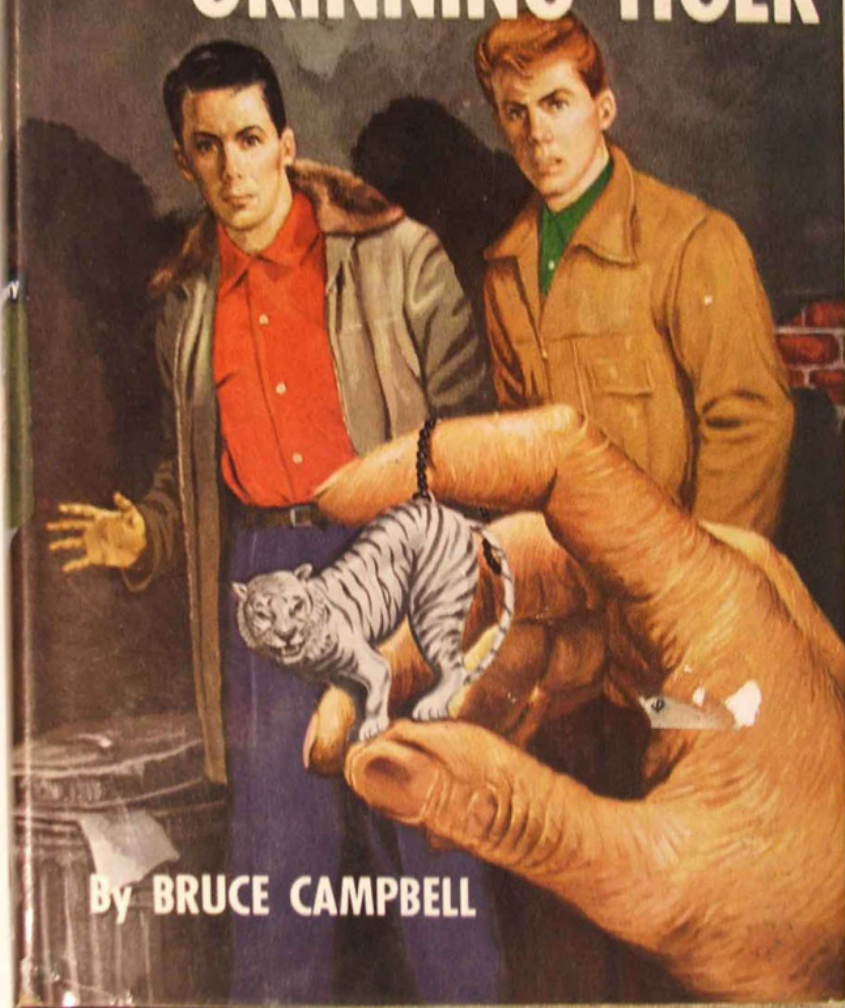


A KEN HOLT Mystery

THE MYSTERY OF THE GRINNING TIGER



By BRUCE CAMPBELL

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The KEN HOLT Mystery Stories

- 1 The Secret of Skeleton Island
- 2 The Riddle of the Stone Elephant
- 3 The Black Thumb Mystery
- 4 The Clue of the Marked Claw
- 5 The Clue of the Coiled Cobra
- 6 The Secret of Hangman's Inn
- 7 The Mystery of the Iron Box
- 8 The Clue of the Phantom Car
- 9 The Mystery of the Galloping Horse
- 10 The Mystery of the Green Flame
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- 16 The Clue of the Silver Scorpion
- 17 The Mystery of the Plumed Serpent
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CHAPTER I

THE GRINNING TIGER FAILS

There were four people around the battered and cigarette-scarred desk that stood at one end of the large room. When they spoke they had to pitch their voices above the endless clacking of the teletype machines on the other side of a thin partition.

In the swivel chair sat short, stocky Steve Granger, manager of the New York office of Global News Service. The thinning gray hair on his head was wildly ruffled and he bit his words off short. "What do you say, Dick?"

Richard Holt, Global's famous foreign correspondent, lifted his slender shoulders a fraction of an inch in a slight shrug. "Seems as if it's the only chance we've got." As he turned toward the two younger men, the glaring overhead light emphasized the blackness of his eyes and hair and picked out the faint threads of gray at his temples.

"How about bringing us up to date?" Sandy Allen suggested, shifting his two hundred pounds of muscle into a more comfortable position on the hard chair. His tweed jacket strained across the shoulders as he moved, and his bright red hair glinted like a traffic light.

"That would be a help, Dad," Ken Holt agreed. He was slighter than his redheaded friend, with the black eyes and black hair of his famous father. But Ken's slenderness, like his father's, concealed a stamina that matched the strength of Sandy's powerful bulk.

"I thought you'd briefed them," Granger said brusquely to Holt.

Holt grinned faintly at the other man's characteristic impatience. "They only arrived five minutes ago," he pointed out.

Granger shuffled some clippings on his desk. "O.K., I'll handle it-and make it fast. You know about Timothy Crandall, world's youngest millionaire-the kid who inherited a hundred million dollars when his parents were killed in a car crash a couple of years ago." He made it a statement, not a question.

"Who doesn't?" Sandy asked. "Besides, he-"

Ken broke in. "I take it Global knows about Timothy having written us that letter, Sandy. That's probably why they brought us up here. Am I right, Dad?"

Granger didn't give Richard Holt a chance to answer, but his own next words proved the correctness of Ken's guess. "You two got a fan

letter from him not long after you got yourselves into that mess in Mexico-the situation you so luridly described as *The Mystery of the Green Flame*.”

“Now wait a minute!” Sandy sat up straighter. “We were dragged into that mess-it wasn’t our fault. And we didn’t hear any loud objections from Global when we handed you the story on it, and those pictures. That reminds me. You never paid me for those extension cords I sacrificed, so Ken and I could give Global that great scoop. You still owe me three dollars and twenty-five cents.”

Granger groaned in mock agony. “After what I paid you for those pictures, you have the nerve to-! All right, all right! I’ll put in a voucher for you right away. But first I want to clear up this Timothy Crandall business.” He riffled once more through the clippings on his desk.

“I didn’t bring up the Mexico stuff,” Sandy muttered, while Ken and his father exchanged an amused glance. Granger’s traditionally noisy bark was used to conceal the fact that he had no bite at all.

“Timothy’s parents were killed three years ago, when he was seven,” Granger went on in his clipped voice. “The boy was then sent to live with his grandmother in England, because-according to the statement issued by Ralph Walsh, the estate’s attorney-his only living relative in this country was a bachelor uncle, Luther Crandall, and it was agreed the boy would have more of a real home in England.”

Richard Holt inserted a few words while Granger picked up another clipping. “I think there was also another reason for sending the boy abroad. My impression at the time was that Walsh felt the boy had been hounded by reporters over here, and that he’d be more likely to be let alone at his grandmother’s place.”

“Could be.” Granger nodded. “The boy was big news for a while. Anyway, the grandmother died several months ago, shortly after Luther Crandall married and thus became a better candidate to serve as the boy’s guardian. So Timothy is being brought back here to live with his uncle and his new aunt at the big Crandall estate at Crag’s End, Long Island. Walsh has confirmed that fact-but he won’t give us any hint as to when the boy is due to arrive. And that’s what we want to know. Timothy Crandall is just as big a news story now as he was three years ago.”

“But where do we come in?” Ken asked. As he spoke, his fingers closed over a heavy silver charm that hung from the key chain in his pocket-a beautifully modeled tiger caught at the moment of a fierce crouch, but wearing a silly grin on his tiny silver face. There was a similar grinning tiger in Sandy’s pocket, and both were gifts from Timothy Crandall, in gratitude for the autographed pictures Ken and Sandy had sent him in response to his request. Grinning tigers,

Timothy had written earnestly, were supposed to mean good luck, and good luck was what he wished for “you two famous detektives.” Timothy had added that he hoped to be a “detektive” too when he grew up, and that he intended to model his career on the careers of Ken and Sandy.

Ken glanced at Sandy. The redhead also had his hand in his pocket and Ken knew that Sandy was also fingering his grinning tiger charm. When Sandy met his eyes and shook his head slightly, Ken knew that Sandy agreed with him: there was no point in telling Granger about the little tigers. They might make an amusing paragraph for Global News, but neither of them had any wish to manufacture news out of young Timothy’s admiring gifts.

“We’re getting around to you,” Ken’s father was saying, “but there’s a little more fill-in first. The office here got an anonymous phone call last night, saying that young Crandall was arriving today on the three o’clock plane from England. When we reached Walsh, to check on the tip, the lawyer denied it vehemently. He said Luther Crandall and his wife were not expecting the boy in the near future—were, in fact, now in Florida, where they obviously wouldn’t be if they knew the boy was due.”

Granger picked it up. “The question is: was Walsh telling the truth, or was that just a stall to try to prevent newsmen from covering the kid’s arrival? And naturally we haven’t been able to locate Luther Crandall yet to check with him. Walsh won’t tell us where he is. So of course we’ll cover the plane arrival, anyway—along with all the other news services and every paper in the city, because they were all tipped off too. But if the boy really does come in today, Walsh is obviously ready to guard him against all of us.”

“And that’s where you two come in,” Holt said. “The boy has seen your pictures. We’ll assume he’ll recognize you if he sees you in person. So we want you to go out to the airport and stand in some spot where the boy will be certain to see you. We’re banking on the fact that he’ll probably be so eager to talk to you that he’ll override Walsh’s objections.”

Ken frowned. He admitted to himself that he was curious to meet the boy who had written Sandy and himself two such warm and lively letters, and who had chosen his presents for them with such childish earnestness. But there was something vaguely unpleasant about trading on the youngster’s admiration. On the other hand, Timothy’s return to the United States was legitimate news, and Ken suspected that the boy himself would not object to being interviewed by what he called “you two famous detektives.”

“But he’s only a youngster,” Ken said aloud. “He’ll probably have to do whatever that lawyer Walsh tells him to.”

Granger grinned. "Walsh's law firm makes a sizable sum out of handling the Crandall estate. I don't think Walsh will actually bite the hand that feeds him-not very hard, anyway. If the boy really wants to talk to you, I'm betting he'll get his way."

"But you don't expect Walsh to let us have an exclusive interview while a lot of other newsmen stand around with murder in their eye, do you?" Sandy asked.

"We don't want you to try to interview him at the airport," Granger explained. "We just want you to get word to the kid that you'll visit him at the Crandall estate later on. Naturally, we'll expect a picture of him as he comes in, and a human-interest story on his well-guarded arrival-the sort of thing the other newsmen will all be doing. But you'll be the only ones, we hope, who will set up a personal interview for later on."

Sandy's parting shot, as he and Ken left the office a few minutes later, was, "But I don't give you the pictures until I get that three dollars and twenty-five cents."

Granger's snort followed them down the corridor toward the elevator.

"Well, at least it's a nice safe assignment," Ken said resignedly. "The worst that can happen to us is that we don't get an interview."

Sandy grinned. "The way you attract trouble, I wouldn't be surprised if a tornado hit the airport just as we arrive."

An attendant brought their red convertible up from its subterranean parking place in the huge basement garage beneath the Global News Building and Sandy slid behind the wheel to guide the car through the crush of New York traffic toward the Triboro Bridge.

"To what are you giving your undivided attention?" Sandy asked Ken, after he had paid the bridge toll. "Why the overpowering silence?"

"Feeling sorry for Timothy Crandall, I guess," Ken admitted.

"Hah!" Sandy edged smoothly around a slow-moving station wagon. "Poor little boy-absolutely penniless except for a measly hundred million dollars."

"Sound hard-boiled if you want to," Ken said quietly. "But you don't know what it feels like to have no real home, no--"

"You starting that again?" Sandy broke in, his face growing nearly as red as his hair.

"All right." Ken grinned to himself. Sandy always reacted with furious embarrassment when Ken edged up on any reference to the fact that the redheaded Allen clan of Brentwood had rescued Ken himself from much the same kind of life Timothy Crandall led.

Motherless since early childhood, Ken had spent most of his first years in boarding school, seeing his father only during the brief

intervals between Richard Holt's far-flung reportorial assignments for Global News. And Ken knew he would never forget the night when he had blundered, alone and helpless, into the office of the small weekly newspaper, the *Brentwood Advance*. That was the night his whole life had changed. Sandy, his older brother Bert, and Pop Allen had all joined forces with him immediately in the desperate task of rescuing Richard Holt from the hands of a ruthless gang. But that grim adventure, which came to be called *The Secret of Skeleton Island*, was only the first of many which Ken and the Aliens shared. Because, when Richard Holt was safe again, tiny Mom Allen had told him firmly that Ken-and his father too-would thereafter be regarded as members of the Allen family. And from that moment on Ken had had a real home. He and Sandy, as close as brothers, had since lived through many adventures as exciting as *The Secret of Skeleton Island*. They had made good use of their adventures too. Ken's stories of the various episodes, illustrated by Sandy's photographs, had been published not only in the Allen-owned *Brentwood Advance*, but had also sometimes won world-wide distribution through Global News.

"Relax," Ken advised Sandy, when the silence between them had stretched into minutes. "My reportorial mind is now busy trying to figure out a way to speak to Timothy Crandall."

"Good," Sandy grunted, showing his relief at Ken's change of subject. Words of praise or gratitude were more difficult for Sandy to endure than any kind of physical hardship. "But I suspect that problem is beyond even your genius. I have a feeling that we're going to fumble this assignment-unless our grinning tigers bring us a little good luck."

Fifteen minutes later Sandy was braking the car to a halt in the huge parking area at one edge of the big airport. "Let's go," he said, slipping his small camera into his coat pocket. "We've got a quarter of a mile to walk and not much time."

A bitter wind struck them full in the face as they headed toward the long terminal building that was surrounded by a dozen large hangars. They turned up their coat collars against it and shoved their hands deep in their pockets. The drone of a plane overhead seemed almost a part of the wind's roar. And when they reached the edge of the parking space, and turned right along the sidewalk edging the main road leading directly up to the terminal, the wind seemed to turn too, so that it still stung their faces and brought tears to their eyes.

They knew the airport well enough to know that customs inspection, for all passengers arriving from foreign countries, took place in a one-story wing branching out from the two-story terminal building. A fenced-in area just outside that wing was the private

parking space for cars belonging to the United States Customs staff. But in several previous visits to the airport Ken and Sandy had never noticed that a gate set into that fence gave direct access to the road along which they were hurrying. They noticed it now only because a large black sedan that had just roared past them slowed down suddenly, swerved across the sidewalk up ahead of them, and stopped with its gleaming bumper almost touching the wire mesh. A uniformed attendant was trotting across the paved parking area toward the gate almost as soon as the limousine's chauffeur tapped his horn. The gate swung inward. The attendant and the car's lone occupant nodded briefly to each other as the big vehicle slid soundlessly through just as the boys approached.

"Is the London plane on time?" Ken called out.

The attendant pulled the gate shut and locked it before he answered. "So far as I know. Expecting somebody?"

"We're not sure," Ken told him.

The attendant grinned. "That means you're here hoping to see young Crandall-you and a dozen others. They're all in there now"-he jerked his head toward the customs wing-"yowling their heads off at some lawyer."

"Ah-hah!" Sandy muttered under his breath. "So Walsh is here! And if Walsh is here, can Timothy be far behind?"

Ken grinned back at the attendant. "Thanks. If the lawyer's here, I guess we are expecting somebody after all. Was that a Crandall car you just let in?" he asked on a sudden afterthought.

"I wouldn't know," the man said, carefully noncommittal.

"But is it possible for an arriving passenger to clear through customs and then leave by way of this gate, instead of going out the front entrance of the building?" Ken asked.

"It's been done," the man admitted, his grin returning briefly. "By diplomats and people like that who want to avoid reporters." His head cocked up at a plane that was circling the field in a long downward slant. "There she is now. Be unloading in ten minutes. Well, good luck to you!" And he swung away.

"Wait a minute!" Ken called after him. "Where does the plane stop while it unloads?"

"Over there." The man pointed to a gate in the far side of the fenced area. "The passengers are herded right through here into the inspection room." He grinned once more and then turned away.

"So they're fenced in from the time they get out of the plane until they're through customs," Sandy murmured as he and Ken started on at a fast walk. "That means we won't have a chance to see Timothy until all the routine is finished, and by that time Walsh will have his cordon all organized, and Timothy will be whisked out that back gate

before you can say one hundred million dollars. Result: no interview.”

“Maybe.” Ken was studying the terminal building as they neared it. “But I’ve got an idea. Follow me, Watson.”

They entered the main door of the terminal building and turned right toward the section set aside for customs inspection. A low railing marked the boundary of the general waiting room, open to the public. Some twenty feet beyond the railing was a solid wall, with a single closed door, that shut off the actual inspection room. Against the railing crowded some twenty-five or thirty people. Among them were several who were obviously friends or relatives of incoming travelers. But the bulk of the group consisted of reporters and photographers, the latter with their cameras open and ready.

Ken had just noticed, through one of the big windows, that the London plane had landed and was wheeling to taxi back over the mile-long runway that ended at that gate in the fence, when a tall, rangy man touched him on the arm.

“Hi,” the newcomer said. “You two covering for Global?”

Ken nodded. “If there’s anything to cover.”

“Hmm.” Bud Fellows was a reporter on a big morning daily, and Ken and Sandy knew him to be one of the best in the business. “That’s interesting,” Fellows murmured. “The airport is usually Ben Roth’s beat. How come you’re here instead? You got an inside track or something?”

“If we had, wouldn’t we be cozying up to Walsh instead of waiting out here with the rest of the ordinary hired help?” Ken countered.

“Nobody can cozy up to the silver-tongued Walsh of the legal double-talk,” Fellows said. His eyes narrowed. “Besides, I never quite trust you two. However, I’ll give you a piece of friendly advice just to show there’s no hard feelings: don’t waste your time waiting out there at the back gate. That’s how Walsh is going to get him out, all right, but the car won’t even slow up for the turn into the road. And its first stop will be the Crandall estate, which is surrounded by walls fifteen feet high to keep out tramps, reporters, and other riffraff.” He sketched a salute to them as he moved off. “I’ll keep my eye on you,” he added over his shoulder.

“All right,” Sandy said impatiently in Ken’s ear. “You said you had an idea. Let’s hear it.”

“Come on.” Ken moved toward a flight of stairs leading upward. “We’re going up to the observation deck, where we can watch the passengers cross from the plane to the customs room.”

“What for?” Sandy demanded, hurrying after him. “That deck’s on the top of this main part of the building—the two-story part. We won’t be within a couple hundred feet of the passengers. What good will that do us?”

Ken didn't answer. He needed all his strength to push open the observation-deck door against the force of the December wind.

Over the railing that surrounded the deck they could look down at the huge silver ship that had come to rest some hundred and fifty feet from where they stood. Only a scant fifty feet separated it from a door in the corner of the customs wing. The landing platform was already in place and the plane door was opening.

"You see?" Sandy shouted. "We can't--"

Ken interrupted him. "This may be your only chance at a picture. Get ready."

Sandy glared at him briefly, but even as he did so, he was pulling his camera from his pocket. "Granger doesn't want a shot of the top of the kid's head," he muttered.

Ken said, "I'll call to him-get him to look up here. And then ask him if we can see him later. If he recognizes us, a couple of words ought to be enough."

The passengers were coming down the landing steps now, one by one. Ken and Sandy watched intently.

Suddenly, several hundred feet away, the four motors of an idling plane revved up to full force and the entire observation deck seemed to vibrate with the earth-shaking roar.

Ken caught the look Sandy sent him. It said that Ken's scheme, which had been doubtful at best, now had no chance at all of succeeding. No voice could carry over the sound of those motors. Ken was about to nod his discouraged agreement when his expression changed. He jerked off one glove and his cold fingers fumbled at his coat buttons.

The plump middle-aged woman about to leave the plane looked nervously down the portable flight of steps and then beckoned to someone behind her. A young boy appeared at her side, wearing a heavy overcoat and an English schoolboy's cap, and together they slowly descended the stairs.

Ken and Sandy had never seen a picture of Timothy Crandall but they would have recognized him anywhere. The boy looked, Ken thought, much as he himself must have looked at that age-a little too thin, a little too solemn for his years.

Beside him, he heard Sandy fruitlessly shouting against the wind. "Timothy! Hey, Tim!"

Ken's fumbling hand had finally found his pocket and now he pulled it out, closed over a small object. He raised his arm high overhead and then flung it forward. A small bright object glinted in the cold sunlight as it arced out and downward to land on the asphalt ten feet in front of Timothy as he reached the foot of the stairs. It bounced once and then lay still.

The small boy stopped still for a split second and then pounced on it. An instant later he was holding Ken's grinning tiger clutched tightly in his gloved hand, and was looking wildly around. Just as his eye lighted on the two waving figures standing on the observation deck, high above his head, the four roaring plane motors nearby died away to a soft throbbing.

"Timothy!" Ken's shout rang clear and distinct through the suddenly quiet air. "Welcome home-from Ken Holt and Sandy Allen!"

The small solemn face split in a wide grin, aimed directly at them. "Hello!" The thin piping voice carried clearly. "How wonderful to-" He broke off abruptly as the woman beside him bent quickly over his slight figure. When he looked up again the grin had faded. "I can't talk to you now!" he called. "But I'd like it awfully if you'd come to see me at my home."

"Sure!" Ken shouted. "When?"

"Tonight? But not too late because I'm not allowed-"

Once again the middle-aged woman-Timothy's governess, Ken assumed-interrupted him. And this time she urged him forcibly along in front of her. The youngster cast one appealing look up at the boys and once more he waved the hand that held Ken's tiger.

"Tonight! At eight!" Ken called down to him, and then Timothy Crandall vanished from sight around a corner.

"Nice going!" Sandy snapped his camera shut. "I think I got a couple of good shots too."

Both of them were abruptly aware again of the bitter cold which they had almost forgotten in the tension of the past few moments. As they pushed open the door leading back inside they saw Bud Fellows leaping down the stairway ahead of them, his overcoat flapping behind him like the wings of some ungainly bird.

"Oh-oh," Sandy said softly. "We are now going' to be murdered by the members of New York's Fourth Estate-not that they wouldn't all have done the same thing if they had had the opportunity."

When the boys reached the general waiting room on the first floor, a distinguished silver-haired man was addressing the group of reporters clustered against the rail. "The boy is tired," he was saying, "and can see no one now. But perhaps, after he has rested at the Crandall estate for a few days, a meeting with the press can be arranged. My associate, Mr. Brooks"-he indicated the good-looking younger man who stood beside him-"will now distribute a brief statement I have prepared for you."

The voice of Bud Fellows rose above the hubbub that greeted Walsh's stiff remarks. "But why are Holt and Allen of Global News getting an exclusive interview, Mr. Walsh?"

"That did it," Ken muttered. "I was afraid of something like that."

“Who?” Walsh was saying in a puzzled voice.

“Holt and Allen,” Fellows repeated clearly. “They called down to Timothy from the observation deck and made a date with him for this evening. The rest of us find this pretty unethical, sir. If any newsmen are allowed to speak to the boy, we should all be given the same opportunity.” The note of hurt nobility in his voice was in marked contrast to the swift, mocking wink he sent toward Ken and Sandy the moment he finished speaking.

Walsh held up his hand to still the buzz of conversation that erupted after Fellows’ speech. “Timothy Crandall is not old enough to make decisions in regard to the press,” he said firmly. “I assure you that there will be no interviews tonight with *any* gentlemen of the press. And I assure you that when I schedule a date for an interview, it will not be arranged exclusively for one newspaper or one news service. Now, Mr. Brooks, let’s have those statements.”

The good-looking younger man stepped efficiently forward and began distributing single mimeographed sheets of paper. “Mr. Walsh will be glad to answer any questions you may have,” he assured the reporters, and Walsh, smiling genially now, nodded his head.

“Let’s get out of here,” Ken said quietly to Sandy, and headed for the door.

CHAPTER II

NO ADMITTANCE

Sandy caught up with Ken at the outer door.

"If Timothy hasn't already left," Ken told him, leading the way at a fast clip, "maybe we can call to him as he goes through the gate. Walsh hasn't had a chance to warn the chauffeur about us—he's too busy keeping the rest of the reporters occupied back there. So let's see if we can't let Timothy know that Walsh is going to try to keep us out tonight."

"You mean so Timothy won't be disappointed when we don't keep our appointment?"

"We owe him that much at least," Ken agreed. "But maybe Granger's right about Walsh not wanting to bite the hand that feeds him. If Timothy knows Walsh has changed his mind for him, maybe he'll put up enough of a fight to get us admitted after all."

As they drew near the gate, where they had talked to the airport attendant on their way to the terminal building, they could see the black limousine, close to the customs wing of the building. It had two occupants now, besides its chauffeur. Timothy was kneeling on the back seat, looking out at the field through the rear window, and his governess was sitting erectly beside him.

Ken and Sandy sprinted toward the gate in the fence as the attendant moved forward to unlock it. It swung open as they reached it.

There was recognition and a faint trace of sympathy in the attendant's grin. But there was no mistaking the firmness in his voice when he said, "Don't hurry. You can't come in here, anyway."

"We know," Ken assured him. "We just want to watch the car drive past."

The attendant raised his eyebrows questioningly and then turned away to motion the limousine forward.

Sandy had his camera out again as the big car moved slowly over the smooth asphalt. But the chauffeur braked it to a full stop almost immediately, as two buses and three taxicabs appeared some distance down the road, heading toward the terminal.

Ken punched one clenched fist into the other gloved palm. "Fellows was right," he muttered. "He's going to wait in there until the road is absolutely clear, and then he's going to come past here at full speed. Even if we try to shout, Timothy won't know what we're talking about."

One after the other the buses and taxis rumbled past. When the last

one had cleared the gate entrance, Ken looked swiftly in both directions. The road was clear now, except for a dark-green convertible moving in the opposite direction, as if it had just dropped somebody off at the terminal building and was now leaving the airport.

“Well, maybe you can get one more quick picture, anyway,” Ken said. “As soon as this green convertible gets past-”

But just then the big limousine inside the enclosure started up again. The attendant, some twenty feet inside the gate, gestured to indicate the approaching convertible, but the car didn’t stop. The chauffeur, his face impassive and his eyes expressionless behind sunglasses, merely blew a couple of short blasts on his horn as he continued toward the gate. Just before he reached it, he stepped down on the accelerator, so that the car shot through the opening, swung sharply left with a screech of tires, and zoomed down the road.

It had almost grazed the green convertible’s front fender as it made the turn. And as the convertible moved down the road, its speed was reduced to a bare crawl, as if its driver had been unnerved by the limousine’s sudden emergence and his own near brush with catastrophe.

There had been one split moment when Ken had been aware of Timothy Crandall’s small face looking out at them through the limousine window, his eyes alight. Then the swift lunge of the car had driven the boy’s small body back hard against the seat. There had not been time for Ken to shout so much as a single word. In fact, he had not even had the impulse to shout. He had been too alarmed at what had appeared, for a moment, to be the inevitable clash between the limousine and the smaller car.

“Wow!” Sandy breathed gustily beside him. “I got a picture-but only because I accidentally snapped the shutter when I nearly jumped out of my skin.”

The barely averted accident had broken down the attendant’s reserve too. “That was a fool thing to do,” he said, as he slammed the gate shut. “Suppose that convertible had been going just a little bit faster?” He shook his head in disgust. “Some of those big-car drivers just take for granted everything else on the road will stop for their benefit.” He snapped the padlock into place. “Well, all’s well that ends well, I guess.” And he turned and walked back toward the customs building.

Ken let out a deep breath. “That was certainly close. I bet Walsh would have had a fit if he’d seen it. Did you really get a picture?” he asked Sandy. “Of Timothy, I mean,” he added. “Not just of a vanishing taiUight.”

“I can’t be sure what I got,” Sandy admitted. “But at least the ones

I took from the observation deck ought to blow up all right.”

“Let’s hope so. Because it looks as if that’s all we are going to get today-except Walsh’s statement, of course. I suppose we might as well go back and pick that up.”

“And then what?” Sandy asked, as they started back toward the terminal.

“Then, I guess,” Ken said wryly, “we might as well call Granger and tell him we missed the ball.”

Fellows and the other reporters were just emerging from the building when they reached the door.

“Get another scoop, boys?” Fellows raised his voice to share the joke with the other newsmen. “Or just a glimpse of the back of the limousine hightailing it for the Crandall fortress?” Then he grinned widely at the sight of the expression on Ken’s face and pulled a folded sheet of paper from his pocket “Too bad,” he said with mock sympathy. “Here. I’ll make you a gift of a copy of Walsh’s statement. Just so you can prove to your boss that you really turned up here this afternoon.”

“Thanks.” Ken took the statement. “Not that we couldn’t prove it without your help.” He gestured toward Sandy’s camera.

Sandy nodded solemnly. “Quite, quite, old boy. I have here,” he explained to the others, “exclusive-and I really mean exclusive-shots of Timothy Crandall, boy millionaire.”

Fellows lost his air of amusement. “Are you serious?” he demanded. Several of the other men in the group echoed the same question. “What have you got?”

Ken began to push his way through to the door. “You can all see it in your own papers tomorrow,” he assured them. “Of course it’ll be credited to Global News, and your editors will probably wonder what you were doing this afternoon while the alert Global photographer got his amazing shots, but you mustn’t blame us for that.”

There was laughter behind them as they stepped through into the terminal waiting room, but Sandy muttered grimly, “If none of my pictures turn out, we’ll wish we hadn’t talked so big.”

“Don’t worry,” Ken said. “You don’t miss very often. And now to confess failure to Granger the Gorgon.” He fished change out of his pocket and stepped inside the nearest phone booth.

When he emerged a few minutes later, Sandy asked, “Well? Did he bite your head off?”

“Not exactly.” Ken grinned. “He just told us to go and put it in the lion’s mouth.”

“What does that mean?”

“He insists that we drive out to the Crandall estate, send our names in, and wait for Timothy to get us admitted. I explained to him what a

long shot it was-how Walsh heard about our original arrangements with Timothy, thanks to Bud Fellows-but he seems to think it's worth trying, anyway. So ours not to question why, I guess. Oh, yes! And he sounded happy about your pictures-as happy as Granger ever does sound. He wants you to send them in by messenger right away. Here-I'll give you some captions for them." Ken began to scribble on the back of the Walsh statement while Sandy wound the film on his camera to the end of the roll, so that it could be removed. "I gave Granger what little story there is on Timothy's arrival," Ken added.

It was four-fifteen when Sandy got the car out of the parking lot and onto the road. Traffic was heavy in the neighborhood of the airport at that hour of the day, and heavier still on the parkway leading eastward on Long Island.

"What is Crag's End?" Sandy asked, inching the convertible along in the crowded lanes of cars. "Is there a town with that name, or is that just the name of the Crandall estate?"

"According to Granger, there's a village called Crag's End," Ken answered. "And that name is also used for the whole surrounding region-a headland sticking out into Long Island Sound and big enough to accommodate a dozen or so large estates. The Crandall estate is one of them, and it's supposed to be located about half a mile past the village."

It took them an hour to cover the scant thirty miles from the airport to the Crag's End turnoff, and the early winter dark had closed in by then. When they swung off the main highway their headlights illuminated nothing but the narrow roadway ahead, and the walls and fences of the large estates bordering it.

At a sign that read: CRAG'S END-DRIVE SLOWLY, Sandy pulled down to a crawl. The village consisted of only a handful of buildings-a gas station, a meat market and grocery store, a drugstore, and a hardware and appliance shop. Beyond it, the road was dark again, and once more bordered by high walls or fences.

"Take it easy now," Ken cautioned, "or we may miss the gate."

"Hospitable sort of neighborhood, isn't it?" Sandy muttered. The woven-wire fence on Ken's side of the road and the stone wall on Sandy's side were both well above the height of a man-more than high enough to discourage climbing.

"Hold it!" Ken said suddenly.

They had almost passed a break in the high stone wall on their left. Sandy halted the car, backed up several feet, and let his headlights illuminate a small neat sign that read: CRANDALL. Just beyond the sign a broad driveway of crushed white stone led, at right angles to the road, to a pair of tall iron gates. Sandy turned the wheel and the convertible moved forward and into the driveway. He stopped it ten

feet from the barrier, beyond which the driveway seemed to lead straight ahead like a broad white finger pointing at the irregular pattern of lighted windows some distance away among bare-branched trees.

"Now what?" Sandy asked.

But just as he spoke, two powerful floodlights flared into life atop the high wall. The downward angled glare was dazzling. And above the quiet purr of their idling motor the boys could hear the hoarse bark of a dog—a vicious sound that grew rapidly louder as they listened. An instant later a huge yellow animal lunged against the far side of the gates, its great mouth agape, its teeth gleaming in the light.

"Down, Duke! Down!"

The dog sank slowly back to its haunches, eyes fixed rigidly on the boys' car, throat pulsating with the fury of the loud, regular barking.

Now Ken and Sandy had a clear view of the man standing just behind the dog. He was dressed in corduroy trousers and a heavy leather Mackinaw, and there were big ear muffs on the cap he wore. His lips were moving and the boys could hear an occasional broken word, but the substance of what he was saying was drowned by the dog's barking.

"Come on," Ken said. "We'll never get anywhere sitting here."

He and Sandy got out of the car and moved forward to stand between their own front bumper and the gates. Their nearness seemed to double the animal's rage. With a single smooth movement he rose from his haunches and launched himself once more against the upright metal bars.

"Down!" The man cuffed the dog lightly, and this time when the creature lowered himself to the ground his barking ceased. "What was it you wanted?" the man asked. His voice was not unfriendly, and the pipe clamped between his lips gave him a homely air that seemed at odds with the glaring lights overhead and the great beast at his side.

"We want to see Timothy Crandall," Ken said.

The man grinned and shook his head. "You and everybody else, I guess. But there's not a chance. I've got strict orders to keep everybody out."

Ken tried the effects of a grin himself. "Well, we're not exactly everybody," he said. "Timothy knows us. And he wants to see us."

"Does he now?" A woolen gloved hand reached up and removed the pipe. "And how would you be sure of that?"

"He told us so at the airport," Ken explained. "He saw us there and called out to us. He asked us to come here. Maybe you don't believe me," he added, "but if you'll take a note up to Timothy, he'll tell you it's true."

"Look, son," the man said, "I only work here. I take my orders

from Mr. Crandall and Mr. Walsh, and when they say nobody is to bother young Timothy, that means no visits, no notes, no nothing.”

Sandy spoke up then. “Well, nobody can accuse you of not doing your duty,” he said. “But you certainly are preventing us from doing ours.”

“Nothing personal, young man. But orders are orders.”

Ken and Sandy glanced at each other. Granger might feel they had not made sufficient effort to see Timothy, but neither of them could think of any means of getting past the gate and the man and the animal that stood between them and the house beyond.

“And there’s no use your asking me any further questions, either,” the man was saying. “You won’t learn anything from me, so we might as well cut short this conversation right now and get inside out of the cold.” He put the pipe back in his mouth then, as if to mark the official end of his speech.

At that instant another car swung off the road into the driveway, barely braking to a stop in time to avoid crashing into the rear of the boys’ convertible. The man who leaped out of the driver’s seat was shouting even before he had the door open.

“Hawkins! Open up quick!”

It was not until he ran around the convertible and came to a halt close to the boys that Ken and Sandy recognized the new arrival as Brooks, Walsh’s good-looking young assistant.

“Mr. Brooks!” the guard was saying. “Have you got young Master Tim-?”

“Open up the gate and stop blathering like an idiot!” Then Brooks swung around on the boys. “Who are you? And what are you doing here?”

“We’re-“

But Brooks had apparently changed his mind. He cut Ken off short. “Never mind who you are. Just get your car out of the way.”

Hawkins had snapped a leash onto the dog’s collar, and now, holding the straining animal with one hand, he was pulling the gate open with the other.

“Go on,” the man said. “Do what Mr. Brooks says.”

Brooks was hurrying back to his own car, jamming it into reverse and backing up to allow the convertible room to maneuver.

Wordlessly, Ken and Sandy returned to their car. Sandy snapped on the motor, spun the wheel, and reversed to the right, aiming his rear wheels at the neat concrete edging of the broad driveway. Brooks had his car in motion again even before there was sufficient clearance. He swung hard to the left, but even so he scraped past the convertible’s front bumper with less than an inch to spare. The boys had one brief glimpse of Walsh seated beside him as the coupe raced through the

wide-swung gates and tore on up the drive.

Hawkins had the gates shut and locked an instant later, and then he started on a run toward the house without a single backward look. The dog loped swiftly beside him, baying hoarsely again.

"Whew!" Sandy said. "What do you suppose that was all about?" In the glare of the floodlights, still blazing down on the driveway, he turned to Ken.

"And is it your impression that we are not exactly welcome here in any case?"

Ken didn't answer him. Instead, he said in a tight voice, "Did you hear that gate guard say, 'Have you got young Master Tim?'"

"Come to think of it, I guess that is what he said." Sandy sounded startled. "But why-?"

"Exactly," Ken said. "Why hasn't Timothy reached here yet when his car had at least a half hour's start on us from the airport?"

Sandy had already eased his foot up on the brake, preparatory to swinging the car back into the roadway, but now he stepped down on it again and gave Ken's question his full attention. "That is strange," he admitted. "What do you suppose could have held him up? Or do you think," he suggested suddenly, "that Timothy wasn't really being brought here at all? Maybe that chauffeur was taking him to another airport, or to a railroad station, to send him off to join his uncle in Florida. I know Timothy spoke as if he were coming here, but maybe he just didn't know what plans had been made for him."

"That could be the explanation," Ken agreed. "But certainly Hawkins sounded as if he expected Timothy to be with Brooks and Walsh."

"And he did a good job earlier of pretending Timothy was already at the house," Sandy pointed out.

"I don't think that means much. He was just letting us think what we wanted to and not telling us a thing we didn't know. What really worries me is the way Brooks and Walsh came tearing up here like firemen on their way to a four-alarm blaze."

"What do you mean, it worries you?" Sandy demanded. "Do you think something may have happened to Timothy?"

"I certainly hope not," Ken said soberly. "But a youngster worth a hundred million dollars must be quite a temptation to kidnappers."

CHAPTER III

A REFUTED THEORY

"Kidnappers!" Sandy repeated. Then he added briskly, "Now, look, be sensible. Even a highway accident would be a more likely explanation of the car's delay-and that would explain why those two lawyers seemed so excited too." His eyebrows pulled together. "If Timothy was hurt--"

Ken interrupted him. "If Timothy had been hurt along the highway, he'd have been taken to a hospital, and there would be no reason for Walsh and Brooks to come tearing up here. They'd be going to the hospital instead. But let's go find a phone right away and call Granger. He can check on your accident theory fast enough. And if there hasn't been an accident--" He didn't finish the sentence.

"Right." Once more Sandy lifted his foot from the brake and turned the car leftward down toward the road. "Of course there's probably some perfectly simple explanation for the whole thing." He swung out of the driveway into the estate-bordered road. "Maybe--"

"Pull off the road and stop," Ken broke in on him suddenly. He had been looking back through the rear window as Sandy drove. "There's a car coming down the Crandall drive-fast. Let's see who's in it."

Sandy jerked the car over onto the shoulder, a bare fifty feet beyond the entrance to the Crandall drive, and snapped off its lights.

A few seconds later they heard a car skid to a stop on the far side of the locked gates. Then footsteps pounded over the stone driveway, the gate padlock rattled, and they could hear the heavy iron barrier swing open. The car started up again and stopped once more just as it reached the road. Now its front half was visible, and through the back window of their own car, Ken and Sandy could see that it was Brooks' coupe. The single shadowy figure at the wheel seemed to be Brooks himself.

The gates clanged shut. Feet again pounded down the driveway. The boys had a quick glimpse of Hawkins reaching the car, jumping inside it, and banging the door shut as the vehicle leaped into motion again. It swung onto the road in the opposite direction to the one the boys had taken, and its red taillights diminished rapidly.

"Let's see where they're going," Ken said.

Sandy flipped the lever into reverse and raced the convertible backward until he could cut into the Crandall driveway. Then he swung sharp left and took off after the other car. Ken, leaning forward, had just caught sight of the taillights up ahead, when the lights suddenly disappeared.

“Take it easy,” he cautioned. “They must have turned off.”

Sandy pumped the brake and slowed the convertible down as they approached the spot where they had last seen the lights.

“There!” Ken said suddenly. He pointed to a narrow black-top lane that led off the road to the left, toward Long Island Sound. The high stone wall that surrounded the Crandall estate also turned left at that point, just short of the lane.

“That must be where they went,” Ken said. “And there’s no sign saying it’s a private road. Let’s go.”

Sandy swung left and eased the car along at a cautious speed. They had traveled less than half a mile when they saw taillights up ahead.

“They’ve stopped,” Sandy said. “That car’s not moving. Shall we drive right past?”

But before Ken had a chance to answer, their own headlights picked up a car—a coupe—stopped crosswise on the road and blocking it completely. The taillights the boys had seen belonged to another car, a larger vehicle parked on the right shoulder of the road and almost touching the coupe’s front bumper.

“That big car looks like the Crandall limousine—the one that picked up Timothy,” Ken muttered, as Sandy braked the convertible to a halt some feet in front of the barrier formed by the coupe.

Almost immediately, Brooks and Hawkins appeared from the far side of it and started toward the boys’ car. Hawkins came around to the driver’s window and bent down to look in.

“You two again, eh?” His voice was rough-edged now. “I told you that you wouldn’t learn anything around here. Go on—take off!”

Sandy rolled down his window. “Isn’t this a public road?” he asked innocently.

Brooks, just behind Hawkins, edged him aside. “Of course it is,” he said. His good-looking young face was earnestly apologetic. “But it doesn’t go any place except down to the Sound and it isn’t used much in the winter. So Hawkins is naturally surprised to see strangers coming along here at this time of year. It’s his job to keep an eye out for prowlers around the estate. But if you really do want to get down to the Sound—if you haven’t just made a wrong turn—we’ll try to get out of your way in a minute.” He grinned and rubbed his gloved hands together against the bitter cold.

Ken was about to respond to the young lawyer’s polite remarks when Brooks bent closer and looked in at them with a new intentness. “I just realized,” he said, “that it was you two who were at the Crandall gate when I arrived there a few minutes ago. Do you mind telling me who you are?”

“I’m Sandy Allen,” Sandy said. “And this is Ken Holt. We’re from Global News Service. We’re—”

But Brooks was speaking again. "Holt and Allen?" he repeated. "I seem to have heard those names. Of course, you're the two who are supposed to have arranged an interview with Timothy Crandall."

"That's right," Ken said. "We spoke to Timothy at the airport and he asked us to come see him out here."

"You spoke to him?" Brooks looked puzzled. "You sound as if you know the youngster. But I'm an assistant to Mr. Walsh, the estate lawyer, and-"

"We know," Sandy told him. "We saw you at the airport too."

"I figured you had, if you were out there," Brooks said. "But I never heard Walsh mention you two before today-and I thought he made it pretty clear this afternoon that there wouldn't be any interviews until he announced one himself. You say you do know the boy?" He still looked puzzled.

"We never saw him until today," Ken said. "But he'd written to us from England and we wrote back. We were on the observation deck of the airport when he left the plane today and he recognized us and asked us to come see him."

Brooks grinned again. "No wonder that reporter was so eager to spoil your setup. If you'd landed an exclusive interview for Global News, you'd have cut the ground right out from under all the rest of the newsmen. How'd Timothy come to write you, anyway?"

"He'd read some stuff I'd written, and seen some of Sandy's photographs," Ken answered, deliberately vague. He saw no reason to expose Timothy's youthful hero worship of Sandy and himself to this brisk young lawyer's amusement.

"Well, what about it?" Sandy asked. "Our interview, I mean. We tried to persuade your guard here to take a note up to Timothy, but he wouldn't. Then, when you and Walsh came tearing along, we didn't get a chance to repeat our request."

Brooks rubbed his right glove thoughtfully against his chin. "I hardly know what to say," he admitted. "If the youngster really wants to see you, it seems too bad to disappoint him. But Walsh is pretty set against reporters. He doesn't seem to realize that he can't keep the boy in cotton wool all his life. I just don't know-"

"Would it be all right for us to see him as friends?" Ken suggested. "Anything he said to us tonight we'd regard as off the record. We wouldn't try for an interview until Walsh sets up the time for all the newsmen. But since Timothy did ask us to come see him, we'd like to do that, even if we don't get a story out of it."

"It sounds perfectly reasonable to me," Brooks answered. "On the other hand Timothy is pretty tired -Walsh is right about that. He probably ought to be in bed right now, if he isn't already. And frankly," he added, "I like my job too well to try to change Walsh's

mind when I know how he feels about things. Tell you what I'll do, though. I'll deliver a note to Timothy, personally, if you want to write him one."

"And if Timothy says he wants to see us, do you think Walsh will let us in?" Ken prodded.

"Not tonight. I'm pretty sure of that. But he might tomorrow."

"O.K." Ken pulled a sheet of copy paper out of his pocket and wrote a few sentences to Timothy.

While Ken was writing, Brooks said to Sandy, "Hope you don't mind my saying that I'm puzzled as to why you drove down this road. You weren't thinking of trying to climb the Crandall wall, were you? There are several pretty fierce dogs on guard around the estate."

"We saw one of them," Sandy assured him. "That was enough for us."

Ken, folding up the note and handing it out to Brooks, answered the lawyer's question. "The reason we came down here was that we thought something might have happened to Timothy, the way you and Walsh came racing up to the gates a while ago. So when we saw you heading this way we tagged along, in the hope of picking up some kind of a story. Did something happen to him? Was there an accident?" He gestured toward the big car parked alongside the road. "That is the car that picked up Timothy at the airport, isn't it?" he added.

"That?" Brooks said.

And in the same instant Hawkins, silent for long minutes, spoke up. "What business is it of yours?" he demanded.

Brooks looked his apologies once more. "Anything is a reporter's business, Hawkins," he said. Then he went on, turning back to the boys, "Sorry not to have any melodramatic news for you, but that *isn't* the car that was at the airport. It does look like it, but the Crandalls have two identical limousines. The one that brought Timothy home is already in the garage. This one ran out of gas here today, when the chauffeur was running it back and forth trying to locate a rattle. And what with all the excitement of Timothy's arrival, this is the first chance anybody's had to come down and pick it up. Hawkins and I just brought some gas and now he's going to drive it back. See? No story at all."

He grinned again, tucked the note for Timothy into his pocket, and saluted in farewell. "Don't worry. I won't forget to deliver this. And if it's all right for you to see Timothy, I'll get in touch with you myself at the Global News office. And now, if you'll just back out of my way once more—"

Sandy glanced quickly at Ken.

"Sure," Ken said. "Let's get underway, Sandy."

“Right.”

“Thanks a lot.” Brooks was walking back toward his coupe while Sandy was still maneuvering the turn in the narrow roadway.

“What a yarn!” Sandy muttered, when he had the car heading back along the lane once more. “It’s so full of holes I could drive this car through it. For one thing, he said the chauffeur had definitely brought the other limousine back from the airport, so why couldn’t the chauffeur come to pick up this one? Why turn the job over to a high-priced lawyer?”

“Check,” Ken agreed shortly. “What’s more I’m pretty certain that limousine back there is the same one we saw before. I happened to notice that the plate on the car at the airport began with consecutive numbers-six, seven, eight. So did this one.” He glanced down at his watch. “Six-thirty already. Let’s stop and call Granger the first chance we get and ask him and Dad to meet us at the office.”

“Good.” Sandy’s foot jammed down harder on the accelerator. “I still think your kidnapping idea sounds farfetched, but I’m certainly beginning to think that there’s something strange going on around here.”

At the first gas station they came to Sandy had the convertible’s tank filled while Ken made the call.

“What did you tell them?” Sandy asked, when they were heading toward New York a few minutes later.

“Nothing much. Just said there was a curious angle to the Crandall story that we wanted to talk over with them. Granger said that two of your pictures turned out fine. They’ll be in the morning editions of the tabloids when they hit the streets at nine o’clock tonight.”

“Swell,” Sandy said, dismissing the subject from his mind even as he spoke, in order to concentrate on his driving.

The parkway, when they reached it, was heavy with city-bound traffic. It was seven-fifteen when they passed the toll booths on the Triboro Bridge and it was a quarter to eight by the time they turned the car over to one of the attendants of the Global News Building garage.

“This had better be good, boys,” Granger said when they entered his office. “I gave up a good dinner on account of your call. Dick and I here have been eating sandwiches, but it’s not the same thing.”

“Hope you got some for us,” Sandy said.

“We did. And here’s that voucher for your three dollars and twenty-five cents.”

Sandy took the slip of paper in one hand and a sandwich in the other. “Thanks,” he said.

Richard Holt shoved a glossy photograph across the desk.

“Remarkably good shot, Sandy,” he said.

It was the picture Sandy had taken as the Crandall limousine raced through the gate at the airport, and it showed a profile of the chauffeur, a full-faced view of the openmouthed governess, and Timothy in midair, bouncing high off the seat as the car's movement thrust him backward.

"Lucky," Sandy said shortly. "Go ahead, Ken. Let's see what they think of the Crandall mystery."

Ken had picked up a sandwich too, but he neglected to eat it as he summarized the events of the afternoon. He was particularly careful to relate in detail the three items that had seemed to him most curious: the air of frenzied haste shown by Brooks and Walsh upon their arrival at the Crandall gates; Hawkins' surprising question, "Have you got young Master Tim?"; and, finally, the business of the limousine abandoned in the lane-the improbable reason given for its having been left there, and the fact that Brooks rather than the chauffeur had served as errand boy to return it to the estate.

"Sandy thinks I'm reaching too far for an explanation," Ken said when he was finished, "but to me it looks as if they might be covering up a kidnapping-"

"What!" Holt and Granger said simultaneously.

"It could be," Ken pointed out quietly. "If somebody snared the boy on his way home, and then phoned a ransom demand to the estate, word would be sent to Walsh immediately and that would explain his rushing out to the house. Hawkins probably hadn't been informed of it yet, which would explain why he asked Brooks if Timothy was with Walsh and himself. But later, out on the lane, Hawkins did know about it, and that's why he was so short with us. The ransom demand would have ordered absolute secrecy, and naturally they'd be alarmed if anybody came snooping around. Brooks was smoother about it, but he could have been covering up too. And if that limousine in the lane was the one Timothy had been in-and I'm pretty sure it was-Brooks could have been picking it up where the kidnappers abandoned it, and at their orders.

"I know kidnappings don't happen very often," he concluded. "But if anybody in this country could guarantee a kidnapper a million-dollar ransom, Timothy Crandall could."

Granger looked at Richard Holt and Ken's father stared back at him. Then Holt turned to the two boys.

"I just want to ask one question," he said. "Did Timothy leave the airport too quickly for his luggage to have been cleared with him?"

Ken thought back. "I guess he did. If he had much luggage, that is. Probably one of the lawyers took care of that afterward."

His father nodded. "In that case, the luggage may have been in Brooks' car-and the reason why he and Walsh were in such a hurry

may have been because the luggage contained something Timothy or his governess needed immediately. Remember that Walsh has been mighty eager to handle the boy's arrival perfectly, since the uncle isn't here to manage things himself."

Sandy swallowed his last mouthful of sandwich too quickly. "That reminds me," he said. "Why *isn't* the uncle around? He must have known Timothy was coming. Why'd he stay in Florida?"

"We found that out this afternoon," Granger answered him. "One of our Florida correspondents finally found out where Luther Crandall was staying, in spite of the usual Crandall efforts to protect their privacy. He didn't get to see Crandall, of course, but he did learn that the uncle and his wife had reservations on a flight to New York last night, and that they canceled them only an hour before take-off time. From that," Granger went on, "we can deduce that after we got the tip-off about Timothy's arrival, Walsh asked the uncle to stay away to help convince us that the boy couldn't be coming home because his uncle wasn't here."

"Oh," Sandy said flatly. He glanced at Ken. "Then you think," he asked Granger and Holt, "that Timothy was safely in the house when Walsh and Brooks arrived there?"

"He couldn't have been," Ken said, before they could answer. "Or Hawkins wouldn't have said—"

"But suppose," his father broke in, "Hawkins didn't finish what he'd started to say. Suppose his full sentence—if Brooks had let him complete it—would have been 'Have you got young Master Tim's luggage?'"

"'Have you got young Master Tim?' 'Have you got young Master Tim's luggage?' Wow!" Sandy said softly. "That *could* have been what he meant. Couldn't it, Ken?"

Ken took a deep breath and let it out. "I guess it could," he said slowly, struggling to re-evaluate the events of the afternoon in the light of his father's startling but admittedly logical suggestion.

"As for the car in the lane," Richard Holt went on, "that could be explained just as simply too. There probably really are two cars—the Crandalls could certainly afford them. Similar license numbers do exist. Even Crandall cars must develop rattles and run out of gas occasionally. Brooks could have been rushing down to pick it up, because, like his boss, he's overeager to look after the best interests of the estate in Crandall's absence. I really think, Ken," he added with a sympathetic grin, "you let your tendency to melodramatics run away with you when you dreamed up this kidnapping idea."

Granger was reaching for the phone. "If there's any of that pot roast left," he said, "I'll tell my wife to warm it up. You'd better come home with me, Dick, to help explain why I asked for it especially, and

then didn't turn up in time for dinner. Well let these two brilliant detectives go track down a restaurant for themselves." He eyed the boys with sardonic amusement as he spoke a number into the instrument. "We'll even help them out with a few clues," he added. "I'll start a sentence, Dick, and then you interrupt me, and by concentrating on my first few words they may be able-"

"Let's get out of here, Ken," Sandy said, pulling himself to his feet. "Regardless of Mr. Granger's kindly intentions, we don't need any clues in order to find a good restaurant."

Richard Holt took a bill out of his pocket and thrust it at them. "Here," he said. "Have a good meal. And enjoy it. And don't think Granger and I haven't jumped to a wrong conclusion on occasion ourselves."

"What?" Granger bellowed. "You call that a conclusion-that piece of fantasy they just tried to sell us?"

For the second time that day Granger's snort followed Ken and Sandy down the hall as they made their way to the elevator.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHAUFFEUR'S DOUBLE

Just as the clock struck the first quarter after twelve in Richard Holt's New York apartment that evening, Sandy jumped three of Ken's checkers, landed in the king's row, and said, "You're licked again-for the third time tonight. Your mind certainly isn't on this game."

"No. I guess it isn't. I-"

The sound of his father's key in the door interrupted Ken's sentence, and the phone rang as Richard Holt entered the apartment. "I'm right here. I'll get it," he called out to the boys.

"Holt speaking," he said into the phone. "Allen? Yes, he's here." He covered the instrument with his hand and said, "Sandy, it's for you. What have you been up to now?" he asked with a grin as the big redhead moved across the room. "The police chief of Delmont, Long Island, wants to talk to you."

"Huh?" Sandy looked blank. "I never even heard of the town." He took the phone from Ken's father and said, "Hello, this is Allen." He listened a moment. "That's right-I did take it." He listened again, longer this time, and the puzzlement on his face increased. "About three-thirty," he said finally. "But if you'll hold on, I'll see if I can get it any closer than that." He turned away from the phone to Ken. "What time did I take that shot of the Crandall car coming out through the airport gate, do you know?"

"Three-thirty is as near as I can come. Give or take a couple of minutes either way," Ken told him. He was still sitting before the checkerboard, but the vaguely troubled look that had been in his eyes all evening had given way suddenly to a sharply attentive air.

Sandy repeated Ken's corroboration into the phone, listened once more to the voice at the other end of the wire, and then said, "I guess you're right. It couldn't be, in that case... . Sure thing-no trouble at all. Just sorry I couldn't help." He put the phone back into its cradle and turned around. "That's a funny one," he said.

Holt came back into the room from the hall where he had been hanging up his hat and coat. "What is?" he asked.

"A ten-year-old boy walking along a small road in Delmont this afternoon at a few minutes after three-he was on his way home from school," Sandy told them, "saw an unconscious man in the ditch and reported it to the police. The police arrived on the spot a few minutes later with an ambulance, took the man to the Delmont Hospital, and learned that he was drugged. The man is still unconscious and the police haven't the faintest idea who he is. His pockets were empty and

they have no way of identifying him. But the early editions of the tabloids were delivered to Delmont half an hour ago and the chief happened to see that picture I took at the airport. He says the chauffeur of the Crandall car is a dead ringer for their mysterious patient!"

Ken's mind was racing. "But--"

"Hold it, Ken," his father said. "Let Sandy finish."

"There isn't much more," Sandy said. "The chief first called the Crandall estate. Brooks took the call and told him that the Crandall chauffeur was in perfect health. Said the chief could talk to him if he wanted to, but the man was asleep and he hated to wake him. So the chief said he'd take Brooks' word for it, but he was still curious enough to call Global and find out where he could reach me." Sandy ran a hand through his already mussed hair. "Crazy coincidence, isn't it? But that's all it can be, I suppose. After all, Ken and I can both vouch for the fact that the chauffeur was all right at three-thirty, so he can't be the man they picked up unconscious in a ditch at a few minutes after three."

The idea hit Ken with the suddenness of an electric shock. He stood up so quickly that the checkers went flying all over the floor. "Maybe the man we saw wasn't the real Crandall chauffeur!" he exclaimed.

"Ken," his father said sharply, "are you still-?"

"Yes, I am," Ken admitted. "I'm still thinking Timothy may have been kidnaped-and now I'm convinced there's good reason to think so. Look! Suppose the kidnapper looked a lot like the Crandall chauffeur-either naturally or because he could make himself up well enough to get away with it. Why couldn't he have stopped the Crandall car on the way to the airport, knocked out the chauffeur, drugged him, and dumped him in a ditch-after he'd changed clothes with him? Then the kidnapper could drive to the airport, pick up Timothy and his governess, and take them wherever he wanted to."

"Wow!" Sandy said. "You're beginning to make this sound pretty reasonable, Ken. Maybe you *are* right!"

"But anybody who knew the real chauffeur-Walsh, Brooks, Timothy, his governess-any of them would certainly have spotted a phony the minute he got really close," Holt pointed out.

"Maybe," Ken agreed. "But maybe not. We don't know how well any of those people actually did know the real one."

"But in any case," his father went on, "if Walsh and Brooks had driven back to the estate with them -and there was a chance that they might have-the whole thing would have fallen through. They could easily have overpowered any driver who tried to take them some place they didn't want to go. I'm trying to see it your way, Ken," he

went on, "because if anything's happened to Timothy it certainly demands action. But any kidnapping attempt would have required an incredible amount of planning and I don't see how the kidnapper could have thought he'd get away with it, in any event, no matter how well he'd planned."

"But suppose it was the kidnapper who gave the newspapers and news services those anonymous tips on Timothy's arrival?" Ken pointed out. "That guaranteed a crowd of reporters at the airport-which practically guaranteed the need to sneak Timothy out the back door while Walsh and Brooks stayed behind to hold off the press."

"And probably Walsh and Brooks never saw the chauffeur at all," Sandy said suddenly. "Bud Fellows and the rest of them were keeping both those lawyers pretty busy-and the kidnapper could have assumed that's just what would have happened." Sandy had been pacing up and down the room, but he stopped now in front of Richard Holt. "You know," he said, "I'm beginning to get as worried as Ken is. It seems to me it really might have happened the way he thinks. Once the kidnapper discovered when Timothy would be arriving, I don't see why he couldn't have managed the rest of it. Besides, he may have had help. There may be several men in on it, and not just one."

"But if Timothy knew the real chauffeur-or if his governess did-" Richard Holt began.

"But what difference would that make, Dad?" Ken demanded. "The man could just say he'd been hired after Timothy left the country. Or that the real chauffeur was sick today. That wouldn't sound surprising." Suddenly he jumped to his feet. "And you've got to admit, Dad, that this explains that limousine parked out in the lane. I just can't believe the chauffeur would have been driving it up and down out there, no matter how many rattles it had, when there must be a couple of miles of driveway right inside the estate. But if the kidnapper left the car thereafter all, he'd want to get rid of it as fast as possible-and told the Crandalls to get it out of the way before anybody could ask questions-"

He gave up his involved sentence when he saw his father get up and start for the phone.

"All right, Ken," Richard Holt said. "You've made out quite a case, after all. The difficulty is I don't suppose we'll be able to check on it. If the boy has been kidnaped, the Crandalls will probably deny it. They'll have received threats not to let the police or the press know, if they want the boy back alive. But I don't see what harm it would do to pass on your theory, confidentially, to Hotchner of the State Police. If there is a kidnapping, it'll be their baby because the case cuts across municipal and county boundaries. If it becomes an interstate case, the federal agents will take a hand."

Richard Holt's friend, Captain Hotchner, was not on duty at that hour of the night, but he answered the phone promptly at his New York apartment, and he listened patiently as Mr. Holt outlined Ken's ideas and the reasoning behind them. Then Holt listened to him for several minutes before he hung up and turned back to the boys.

"The State Police have had no report of a kidnapping," he told them, "but Hotchner realizes that's beside the point. He's enough impressed by your suspicions to be willing to go into action immediately. Unfortunately, there's not much he can do without a direct request for help. He can't go into the Crandall home and demand to see Timothy. But he'll put a couple of men on the job and see what they can find out. He may get somewhere-he may not."

Now Richard Holt paced the length of the room and back again. He was no longer wearing the quizzical expression that had indicated his reaction to Ken's ideas earlier. "Kidnapping is nothing to fool with, you know," he said. "I'm sure I don't have to tell you how dangerous it might be for Timothy-if he has actually been kidnaped-for a word of the story to leak out."

"Of course, Dad," Ken said quietly. "We know that. But it wouldn't be dangerous for Timothy-would it?-if we tried to collect some information to do a story about him? Since he's not available for interviews, isn't it natural that we'd try to do some other kind of piece? Maybe a feature on the neighborhood, or Timothy's home village of Crag's End."

"And you think you might pick up some leads of your own working on a job like that, I suppose," his father said. "Well, both of you boys have been brought up in the newspaper business. I can't start telling you now not to use what news sense you've got. And I know you're especially concerned about Timothy and won't run the risk of doing him any injury. But *I'm* concerned about you two," he added, "so I'm counting on you to be mighty careful if you do go out to Crag's End tomorrow with the alleged purpose of writing some sort of background story on Timothy's return home." He glanced at his watch. "It's late. Get along to bed, both of you. I'm coming myself as soon as I've given Granger a call on this business. He'll be better able to protect Timothy's interests if he knows what we suspect."

Ken, encouraged by that "we" his father had used, said, "Dad, could Global's London office find out something about Timothy's governess? It would be a help to know if this is her first trip to the United States, or if she'd been Timothy's governess when he lived here with his parents. If she'd never been here before, she certainly wouldn't have recognized a phony chauffeur."

His father nodded. "Good idea. I'll start the wheels turning right away. Now get some sleep and-" The phone cut him off shrilly. Holt

scooped it up and said an abrupt “hello” and then listened. An instant later he said “thanks,” and dropped the instrument back into its cradle. His face was grim when he turned to face the boys. “That was Hotchner,” he said. “He checked the Motor Vehicle Bureau-the Crandalls do *not* have two identical cars.” The silence that settled down like a heavy blanket was broken by his terse, “Get some sleep while you have a chance.”

The next morning, over a hasty breakfast in the Holt kitchen, the boys discussed their plans for the day.

“Delmont first,” Sandy suggested. “If that unidentified man has already been identified, and he’s not the Crandall chauffeur, all our reasoning is worthless.”

Ken agreed. He spread out a map of Long Island and pointed the town out to Sandy. “It’s about fifty miles from here,” he said, “and we can pass the airport on the way. So let’s stop there first and see if we can learn who was on hand when Timothy got into the car. I’d like to find out for sure whether Walsh or Brooks actually saw the chauffeur or not.”

Sandy looked at him over a steaming cup of coffee. “How do you intend to find out, without making people curious as to why you’re asking questions like that?”

“We’re reporters,” Ken reminded him. “We didn’t get an interview with Timothy yesterday, so we’re trying to build up a story in some other way-by telling how Timothy eluded the press, for example.”

“That’s been covered in the morning papers.” Sandy pointed to the stack that Richard Holt had brought in the evening before on his return from dinner at Granger’s apartment. “Bud Fellows has a front-page half column on it.”

“Sure.” Ken, like Sandy, had glanced at all the papers while he drank his orange juice. “But he doesn’t have many details. That’s what we’re going to try to get.”

“O.K. So long as you remember what your father said.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t forget it. But if you hear me say anything that you think is edging toward dangerous ground, kick me or something.”

“Don’t think I won’t,” Sandy assured him, carrying his dishes to the sink and running hot water on them. “You ready?”

There was a threat of snow in the dull gray sky overhead when they emerged into the street. By the time they reached the parking lot, a block and a half from the apartment house, the below-freezing temperature had chilled them both to the bone, in spite of the warm leather jackets they were wearing. When Ken started the convertible’s engine he let it idle for a few minutes to warm up, before he headed for the East River Drive on his way to the Triboro Bridge.

"Brr," Sandy muttered. "This is cold weather for sleuthing."

"Or for anything else," Ken said shortly. He didn't say the rest of what was in his mind, but he knew from Sandy's sudden grim silence that the redhead was sharing his thought. If young Timothy Crandall had really been kidnaped, where was he at this moment? Ken remembered accounts he had read of kidnap victims being held in primitive unheated shacks, and even a momentary vision of a terrified young Timothy Crandall hidden away in such a prison gave an additional chill to the already bitter morning air.

Sandy reached forward to flick on the heater a few minutes later, but even when the slow warmth began to permeate the car, neither of the boys could snap out of their soberly pessimistic mood. They made the trip to the airport in silence.

As Ken parked the car he said, "We'll see if we can find that guard who opened the gate for the Crandall car yesterday. He ought to know what went on."

But although they walked slowly along the fence, and paused to look through the locked gate, they saw no sign of the man they were looking for. The entire enclosure, in fact, was deserted.

"Maybe he's not on duty yet," Sandy pointed out. "It's not even eight o'clock."

"Let's see what we can find out inside," Ken said, and led the way through the main entrance of the terminal building.

But the moment they were inside they exchanged a quick glance of triumph. The man they wanted to see was seated at a lunch counter over a cup of coffee and a plate of ham and eggs.

"Good omen," Sandy said quietly. "We can eat while we talk to him."

Ken grinned at him briefly. The sight of food always cheered Sandy up. And the thought of a second cup of hot coffee was undeniably cheering that morning.

Ken slid casually onto the stool beside the guard's and Sandy took the next one. The man recognized them immediately and grinned around a mouthful of toast.

"Didn't do so well yesterday, did you?" he asked cheerfully.

"It was a bad day for reporters," Ken agreed. Then, as if breakfast were the only problem that concerned him, he studied the menu and ordered pancakes and coffee.

"Make mine the same," Sandy told the clerk. "But I'd like some ham with the pancakes."

The guard looked across Ken at the big-framed redhead. "You must take a lot of filling up."

Sandy grinned. "I do. But I enjoy every minute of the job."

"If we often go back to the office as empty-handed as we did

yesterday, though,” Ken said, taking advantage of the opening, “we’ll both have to go on a diet. That was a mighty slick getaway the Crandall car made. How’d they manage it?”

“Simple enough,” the guard assured him. “The kid and his nurse-or governess or whatever she’ was-had all their papers in order, and they were cleared through in a couple of minutes.”

“What about their baggage?” Ken asked. “That couldn’t be inspected so fast.”

“It wasn’t. Those lawyers that were looking after them took care of the inspection afterward.”

“After they’d taken the youngster to the car, you mean?” Ken asked.

The guard shook his head. “You don’t know your way around this place or you’d know the lawyers wouldn’t have been allowed near the car, because they couldn’t have gone through the inspection room while passengers were being checked in. I don’t know whether they even saw the kid at all, but if they did, it must have been through that fence that shuts off a corner of the inspection room. They could have come into that corner, but they couldn’t have seen the kid any closer than that until he’d left the customs area-until I let that car out through the gate, that is.”

“But if the youngster and his governess didn’t talk to the lawyers, how would they have known the car was there waiting for them?” Ken asked.

“I told them,” the guard said. He grinned again. “Tart of the service our terminal offers to important arrivals.” He drained his cup and slid off the stool. “Well, see you around,” he said. “And better luck next time.”

“I hope so,” Ken said, with an answering grin. But he gave up his pretended interest in his food the moment the guard’s back was turned. “So it looks as if the chauffeur could perfectly well have been a phony,” he said quietly to Sandy, “unless the governess and Tim could identify him. I’m going to call Global and see if they’ve had a report from London on her.”

But he didn’t look any more cheerful when he returned from the phone booth. “The governess arrived here yesterday for the first time,” he reported. “She was born and lived all her life in England.” He sat on the edge of the stool. “And that’s not all. Dad found out that Malloy, the chauffeur, never worked for Timothy’s parents. He’s been Luther Crandall’s chauffeur for years and Timothy may hardly have known him.”

Sandy put his fork down on a half-eaten piece of ham. “All right,” he said. “Let’s make tracks for Delmont.” He laid some money on the counter and got up.

The waitress looked at them in surprise. “Anything wrong?” she asked, eying their unfinished plates.

“Not with the food,” Ken told her, and headed for the door.

CHAPTER V

THE MISSING PATIENT

"We're going to get into that hospital somehow," Ken said determinedly, as he guided the car out of the airport parking lot, "and take a picture of that unidentified man. Then, if we can prove he's the Crandall chauffeur, the State Police may be willing to move in on the case, even if Walsh insists that Timothy hasn't been kidnaped."

"But how'll we be able to prove whether he is or not?" Sandy asked. "We can't just go showing that picture around at random without stirring up a lot of curiosity-and the police wouldn't thank us for that any more than Walsh would."

"If necessary, we'll show it to Walsh himself," Ken said. "If Timothy really has been kidnaped, and Walsh is trying to handle the thing himself, the picture might help convince him how dangerous that is-that he ought to let the police in on it. Don't worry. We won't do anything as drastic as that without talking it over with Dad first. But if we can get that picture, it will at least be concrete evidence to go to work on."

Delmont, which they reached less than an hour later, was part summer resort, part farming center. Some of its shops were obviously closed for the winter, and even those that were open seemed to have few customers. The sidewalks on either side of the main street were almost deserted.

Ken drove slowly through the half mile of the village, and he and Sandy looked down each cross street for some sign of a hospital. They located the building on the far edge of town. It was a small one-story clapboard structure with two wings extending out from a squarish central section.

Ken swung into the semicircular drive that fronted it and parked along a graveled walk. Instinctively they both pulled their collars up high as they left the car and hurried toward the doorway, but even then they shuddered at the icy blast of wind tearing in from the Atlantic not far away. The warm air that enveloped them the moment they stepped into the building was a welcome relief, despite its characteristically hospital odor of disinfectant.

Directly to their right as they entered, and behind a glass window set into a partitioning wall, a middle-aged woman presided over a small telephone switchboard. She slid back the glass when she saw them.

"Yes?" she asked.

"We've come to see the man who was brought in yesterday-the

unidentified man,” Ken told her. “We’re-“

But before he could tell her their names she was speaking nervously, her eyes suddenly round and bright. “The unidentified man? Yes-yes, I see. If you’ll wait just a few minutes I’ll get in touch with the doctor to see if-Sit down, please.” Then she slid her glass window decisively shut before she picked up a switchboard plug and made a connection.

Ken and Sandy eyed each other with faint grins as they made their way to a row of chairs on the other side of the cheerful white-painted lobby.

” ‘Big Drama in Delmont,’ ” Sandy murmured, translating the situation into mock headlines. ” ‘Presence of Unidentified Man in Local Hospital Upsets Routine, Confuses Staff.’ ”

” ‘Police Chief Puzzled,’ ” Ken added. “Let’s stop in and see him when we leave here,” he went on. “We can explain we’re just checking up after his call to you last night-that we thought there might be a story in his mysterious patient.”

“Wouldn’t he wonder why we came all the way out here, instead of picking up the facts from the local paper over the phone? You’re not thinking we have any right to tell him about Timothy, are you?” Sandy added in a low voice.

“Of course we can’t do that,” Ken agreed. “If we learn anything here we’ll pass it on to Dad’s friend, Captain Hotchner, and then if he wants to let the Delmont police in on the situation he can.”

Sandy nodded his agreement and they both fell silent. For five minutes they waited patiently for the woman behind the glass window to report to them on her inquiry. The doctor, Ken supposed, would ask why they wanted to see his patient, and he might be suspicious of two reporters from New York showing such interest in an unidentified man found fifty miles outside the metropolis.

Ken was trying to work out a logical explanation to offer him when Sandy muttered, “I thought from the way she talked that the doctor was right here in the hospital. Why do you suppose it’s taking her so long to check with him?”

Ken glanced at his watch. “Maybe he’s operating, or something, and can’t be disturbed.” But when another five minutes had dragged by he got to his feet. “Let’s ask her how much longer we’ll have to wait.”

They were just approaching her window when the outer door opened, admitting a blast of cold air. The woman apparently heard the door too, because she broke the connection she was making, jumped to her feet, and peered through the glass, past the boys’ heads. Before Ken turned around to follow her glance, he had noticed the look of relief that flooded over her face.

The two men striding into the room were uniformed policemen.

"These are the ones!" The woman had opened her window a scant inch and was speaking shrilly through the crack.

The larger of the two burly middle-aged men looked at Ken and Sandy with an officially blank expression. "The chief wants to see you," he said stolidly. "We have orders to bring you in to headquarters."

"How'd the chief know we were here?" Sandy asked curiously. "We were going to--"

"I'm only obeying orders, bud. I can't answer your questions," the officer said. "Will you both just come along with me now?"

Sandy looked at Ken and shrugged.

"We want to see someone here in the hospital first," Ken said. "But I suppose--"

"We know about that, bud." The officer's face was still carefully blank. "And now if you'll both just come along quietly."

His companion opened the outer door, and the boys, after one more puzzled glance at each other, followed him through. Over his shoulder Ken saw the woman behind the window staring after them with eyes rounder and brighter than ever.

They left the driveway in two cars. The officer who had done all the talking drove with Sandy in the boys' convertible. The silent one took Ken in the squad car that had been drawn up directly in front of the door. Ken didn't attempt to question him as they covered the few blocks that brought them to another small clapboard building bearing a sign that read: DELMONT TOWN HALL AND POLICE DEPARTMENT. The room they were ushered into, at the end of a short corridor, had the words *Chief of Police* in gold on the glass of its doorway.

"Here they are, Chief. The ones who were at the hospital."

The plump gray-haired man behind the desk looked closely at Ken and Sandy. He appeared tired and more than a little worried.

Ken held out his press card and Sandy did the same. "Do you mind telling us what this is all about?" Ken asked.

The police chief took the cards and inspected them both. When he looked up he seemed startled. "Global News?" he said. Then he peered again at Sandy's card and added, "But if you're Allen of Global News you must be the photographer I phoned last night."

"That's right," Sandy assured him. "And it was Ken here who wrote the caption for that picture. We just dropped in today to take a look at your unidentified man. Is he still unidentified? And how'd you happen to hear we were in town, anyway?"

"I didn't. I mean--" The chief rubbed a hand over his thinning hair. Then he turned abruptly toward the two officers still standing in the doorway. "Thanks," he said. "That'll be all now. I'll call you if I want

you.”

They seemed reluctant to depart but a moment later the door had closed behind them.

“Now,” the chief said. He took a deep breath. “Sit down, boys. And I guess I ought to apologize for having you brought down here like this. I didn’t know who you were, of course, when the hospital phoned that somebody had turned up looking for -uh-“

“For your mysterious patient,” Ken finished for him, aware that the man was uncomfortably embarrassed for some reason. “Have you identified him yet?”

“No.” Again the stubby hand smoothed the gray hair.

Sandy shook his head sympathetically, but his eyes were alive with curiosity. “So he’s still unconscious then?”

“No. That is-” Once more the chief took a deep breath. “To tell the truth I can’t answer your question. The fellow’s gone-vanished.”

“What?” Ken almost rose to his feet in his astonishment, but he remembered in time to sink back again and allow only a reporter’s normal inquisitiveness to show in his voice. “What happened?”

The man before them was now definitely red in the face. “If I tell you about it, it’ll have to be off the record,” he said. “I-the hospital, that is-I mean, we’d all look pretty foolish if you built this thing up into a big story and splashed it all over the papers. I can see now I should have put a man on in the ward to guard him, but how was I to know he was tied up with some big-city gang?”

Ken’s eyes narrowed. “You think he was? Anything you tell us will be off the record,” he added hastily. “But naturally we’re interested, after your phone call.” He meant the last words as a polite reminder that it was the police chief himself who had stirred their interest in the man found drugged along a Delmont roadside.

“Thanks. I appreciate that. Under the circumstances, I don’t mind telling you what went on around here last night.” The man leaned forward and rested his arms on his desk. “I went off duty right after I phoned you-that was about twelve-fifteen, I guess.” Sandy nodded and he went on. “That left just one man on for the rest of the night, as usual.

This is a small town and things are pretty quiet here, especially in the winter. One man’s plenty, ordinarily. He spends most of the time cruising around in the squad car, out as far as the highway and back.”

He paused to light a thick cigar before he continued. “But after I got home, before I went to bed, I phoned the hospital for one last check. The intern on duty there told me the man seemed to be returning to consciousness, but very slowly. I asked if I could question him if I went down there, but he said no-the fellow wouldn’t be up to that until morning at the earliest, that he was still dazed and not able

to talk. So I went to bed. I got waked up again at one-fifteen. The hospital was calling to tell me the man had disappeared.”

“You mean he had just walked out?” Ken asked.

“I’ll get to that,” the chief assured him. “Naturally, I came right on down here, and finally I got the whole story. It seems a stranger had walked into the hospital at ten minutes to one. Gave his name as John Wilson. Said he’d slipped getting into his car, landed on his wrist, and sprained it. The intern took him into the emergency room and called the night-duty nurse to help him. They bandaged the man’s wrist and he left at one-five. The nurse made her rounds right afterward—that’s a small hospital, of course, and she and the intern were the only ones on duty there last night—and that’s when she discovered the unidentified man was gone. The fire-exit door was open wide when she walked into the men’s ward, so that’s apparently how he got away. They looked around the grounds for him first, but when they didn’t see any signs of him, they called me.”

“But less than an hour earlier the man had been too dazed and weak to speak,” Ken said thoughtfully, as the chief paused to remove half an inch of ash from his cigar.

“That’s just it,” the chief said. “That’s why I think he must have had help—been carried out—shanghied by some big-city gang that wanted to do a better job on him the next time. Doc Gilbert, the intern, agrees with me that the man who called himself John Wilson was probably a phony. Doc had noticed at the time that the fellow’s wrist didn’t really look hurt, but he says sometimes sprains don’t show up and all you can do is to take the patient’s word for it when he tells you it hurts. So my idea is that this so-called Wilson was deliberately keeping the doctor and the nurse occupied, so another member of the gang could sneak that unidentified man out through the fire door.”

“Are the man’s clothes gone too?” Sandy asked.

The chief shook his head. “They must have brought clothes for him. Oh, it was all slick—mighty slick. They could have figured the layout of the place by just walking around outside and looking through the windows. They could have got into the men’s ward easy enough, once the lobby was empty—it opens right off that room, just back of the receptionist’s window. And they probably had a fast car for their getaway.”

“I don’t suppose anybody noticed such a car in town last night?” Ken said.

“I checked with my cruising squad-car officer on that,” the chief assured him. “He went past the hospital about twelve-forty-five, and Doc Gilbert’s was the only car around the place then. By the time the squad car was due to come past again, I’d already been called in.”

The chief was so touchy on the whole subject that Ken was a little

dubious about asking questions, but there was one he couldn't resist. "Were you able to get a good description of the man who called himself Wilson?"

"Not what you'd call good," the chief admitted. "I suppose it was natural that Doc Gilbert and the nurse were looking more at the fellow's wrist than at the rest of him. They could tell me he was middle-aged and that his hands were calloused, but as for the rest of it-" He shrugged. "Average height, they said, with a dark hat pulled pretty far down and a dark overcoat. And he kept the hat and the coat on while they worked on him, so they didn't get to see the color of his hair or the color of his suit or anything-not that they're trained to notice such things, even if they get the chance," he added, obviously hoping the boys would realize that any failure of his own was understandable in view of the little help he'd had.

"And the other patients in the ward didn't notice anything?" Sandy inquired.

For a moment the chief's soberness gave way to a half-smile. "I told you this was a small town. There was only one other patient in the ward-a fellow who had been burned. Doc had given him some kind of a pain-killer and it kept him unconscious ah1 night. No, sir, they had everything their own way, the chaps that pulled this stunt."

"But how could they have known where the man was?" Sandy asked.

Ken got to his feet before the chief had a chance to reply. "We certainly appreciate your telling us all this," he said quickly. "And now I think we'd better get out of here and give you a chance to get back to work-if we're free to go, that is."

"Of course you are. Sorry to have had you dragged down here. But I thought if anybody turned up at the hospital asking for that fellow, I ought-"

"Of course!" Ken's deliberately hearty voice sounded so false to himself that he was afraid he was overdoing it. But he was determined to get out of the chief's office quickly. "You're following up every possible lead."

He had been moving toward the door as he spoke, and Sandy kept pace with him. The chief accompanied them as far as the corridor, they shook hands all around, and then the unhappy police officer returned to his office while the boys made for the front door of the building.

"I had to drag you out of there fast," Ken murmured, as they leaped into their car. "You were-"

"I know," Sandy said. "Because I'd asked him how the 'gang' could have known that the unidentified man was in the hospital. I realized that was a mistake as soon as I said it. If Brooks and I were the only

people he talked to on the phone last night, and the chief starts getting curious about Brooks and the Crandall estate again, he might rock the boat.” He huddled down low in the seat, shivering in his warm jacket. “But I wish we could have picked up some clue as to who did get that man out of the hospital.”

“It seems to me the most likely bet is Brooks himself,” Ken said slowly. “I just hope the chief doesn’t start thinking that too.”

Sandy eyed him curiously. “How do you figure that?”

“It would be logical,” Ken pointed out. “He and Walsh want to keep everything quiet. They get word that the Crandall chauffeur—at least, they have reason to think that’s who it is—is in the Delmont hospital. They’re afraid that when he becomes conscious he may say something that will bring the police to Crag’s End—and that’s what the kidnappers have told them they must avoid if they want Timothy kept safe. So they tell the chief here that he’s on the wrong track, that the Crandall chauffeur is in bed asleep. Then they arrange to get the chauffeur away from the hospital before he’s able to say anything. Hawkins, the gate guard, was probably the man who called himself John Wilson. The chief said his hands were calloused, remember? And Hawkins’ probably are. Then, while Hawkins kept the nurse and the intern occupied, Brooks—he’s younger and stronger than Walsh—probably slipped into the men’s ward and carried the chauffeur off.”

“Mmm,” Sandy said thoughtfully. “It sounds logical. Would there have been time, though, after the chief talked to Brooks on the phone last night?”

“Let’s see.” Ken pulled out the Long Island map and checked distances. The town of Delmont was twenty-seven miles from Crag’s End.

“I talked to the chief about twelve-fifteen,” Sandy pointed out. “He’d already talked to Brooks. So let’s say Brooks and Walsh heard the news by twelve or a little earlier—earlier, probably, because the chief had to call Global first in order to find out where to reach me.”

“Right,” Ken agreed. “So they might have been on their way to Delmont by twelve-five. At that hour they could have made the trip in thirty-five minutes or so, and could have been here in Delmont by twelve-forty. Let’s say they needed ten minutes to explore the building and figure out how Brooks could get into the men’s ward while Hawkins kept the staff busy. And that makes it right: Hawkins as John Wilson could have walked into the hospital with a faked sprained wrist at ten to one, the hour the chief mentioned.”

“I think you’ve got it,” Sandy said. “Let’s find a phone and call your father.”

He slid the convertible out of the Delmont Town Hall parking place and two minutes later Ken was shutting himself into a roadside phone

booth. When he came out at the end of a brief conversation he looked startled and incredulous.

“What’s up?” Sandy demanded.

Ken slid into the seat beside him and closed the door. “Timothy is safe at the estate!”

“He is?” Sandy’s own look mimicked Ken’s. “The kidnappers brought him back?”

“Dad says Hotchner checked with Walsh, pointing out that Brooks had lied to us about the two indential limousines. Walsh blew up at what he called an unwarranted intrusion on the Crandall privacy. He said Brooks had told us the first story that popped into his head to get us away from the estate. When Hotchner continued to show curiosity, Walsh blew up even more and invited Hotchner to come out and see Timothy for himself. He insisted that Hotchner -or anyone he sent- should come in plain clothes so that reporters wouldn’t get any ideas about there being something wrong with the Crandalls. So Hotchner sent out a plain-clothes man.”

“And he actually saw Timothy?”

“That’s right. Actually saw him,” Ken repeated. “Stood in the doorway of Timothy’s room and looked in and saw him there in bed.”

“In bed?” Sandy questioned. “This was last night?”

“This morning. Timothy wasn’t sleeping-he was in bed because he’s got the measles. Seems he came down with them right after he got home yesterday. The servants were scared and called Walsh at the airport, which is why he and Brooks came dashing to the estate like maniacs. Everything is explained. Everything is O.K. The only thing wrong with this picture is us. We’ve been having nightmares.”

“Whew!” Sandy breathed. Then a slow grin spread over his face. “Measles! And we were seeing the poor kid-” Suddenly he punched Ken’s arm happily. “We can quit worrying! Let’s go have a third breakfast-and let’s really eat this one!”

CHAPTER VI

THE TELLTALE EARS

They stopped at the first diner they came to. Sandy, relaxed now and ravenously hungry, took one look at the menu and handed it to Ken. "I know what I want. How about you?"

"Huh?" Ken was staring unseeingly at a showcase of desserts opposite the counter.

"Food," Sandy prodded him. "Remember? Very necessary stuff. We didn't have much at your father's apartment this morning. We had practically nothing at the airport. So we need some. To sustain life."

"Oh, sure." Ken grinned briefly. "A hamburger and coffee, please," he told the girl who approached to take their order.

"The man's crazy," Sandy told the girl. "He's probably so weak from hunger that he's lost his mind. You'd better bring him two. And bring me a steak, rare, with French fries. And coffee. And some apple pie and ice cream afterward."

The waitress smiled, scribbled down the order, and departed.

"What's the matter with you?" Sandy asked Ken. "Timothy's safe. We can drive back to Brentwood this afternoon, and watch the basketball game tonight with Dad and Bert."

"Don't make so much noise," Ken muttered. "I'm thinking."

"On an empty stomach?" Sandy grinned. "That could be dangerous." Then he looked at Ken more closely. "What is the matter with you, anyway? You catching cold or something?"

"I told you," Ken said. "I'm thinking-trying to figure something out. Here." He reached for a newspaper some previous customer had left on the counter and handed it to Sandy. "Amuse yourself for a while admiring that picture you took yesterday and let me alone."

"Very well. Be antisocial." Sandy took the paper with an expression of injured dignity. "Anyway, my pictures are more interesting than your conversation any day. Especially when they land on the front page like this. Yes, sir, I'm pretty good, if I do say it myself. Say it *to* myself," he added pointedly, but Ken continued to ignore him. And Sandy, accustomed to his friend's moods of occasional silence, settled down seriously to read the news reports he had neglected earlier that morning.

Ten minutes later Ken swallowed a mouthful of coffee and said abruptly, "If the police phoned you and said they'd heard a rumor I'd been kidnaped, what would you do?"

Sandy, deep in a sports story, blinked. "You kidnaped?" He grinned. "Why had you been kidnaped? For the pleasure of your

scintillating company?"

"Seriously, Sandy," Ken said. "Suppose the police did tell you that, what would you do?"

"Tell them they were crazy, of course."

"You wouldn't immediately offer to prove they were wrong by inviting them to come and take a look at me?" Ken suggested.

"Why should I do that?" Sandy demanded. "Wouldn't my word be good enough for—" He stopped short. Carefully he put his knife and fork down on his plate and turned to face his friend squarely. "All right," he said. "Let's have it."

"You've already figured it out for yourself," Ken told him. "If that happened to you, you'd say 'Where'd you get that crazy idea? He's right here.' It wouldn't occur to you that the police might not believe you and that they'd start some kind of investigation on their own—that they'd patrol up and down in front of the *Brentwood Advance* office, say, trying to check up on the fact that I was inside. And even if they did do that, it wouldn't bother you. You'd just think they were being crazier than when they phoned you in the first place."

He pushed his coffee cup aside and went on. "But look what Walsh did. He didn't simply say 'Timothy's right here.' He also said, 'If you don't believe me, send a plain-clothes man to come and look at him.' Now why would a man of Walsh's reputation immediately offer to prove his word by inviting a policeman to the house—unless he was trying to prevent the very thing that wouldn't bother you at all: a full-scale police checkup? Doesn't his behavior seem pretty curious to you," Ken concluded, "unless Timothy actually has been kidnaped and Walsh has been warned, with some threat to Timothy's safety, to keep the police from starting a large-scale investigation?"

Sandy had listened soberly to everything Ken said, but when his friend had stopped talking, he shook his head. "You're overlooking one important thing, Ken. Walsh has what we scientific-minded people call a phobia about publicity. He's scared to death of news stories about the Crandalls. He probably figured that the best way to stop the police from wondering if Timothy had been kidnaped is to let them see the boy. That would convince them once and for all that everything at the Crandall estate is as snug as a bug in a rug."

"Did you ever have measles?" Ken asked. Sandy's mouth dropped open at the sudden change in subject. "You certainly jump around from one idea to another. Sure I had measles, years ago." "And what was it like?"

Sandy's face assumed an air of exaggerated patience. "I really can't recall all the details, though of course I'm flattered at your interest. I just remember that it was very dull having to lie there in bed all day with the shades pulled down because light was supposed to be bad for

your eyes when you had—

“Exactly,” Ken interrupted him. “The shades are probably pulled down in Timothy’s room today too. So how do we know whether that plain-clothes man saw Timothy—or just any boy of approximately Timothy’s age? As a matter of fact, the officer probably had never seen Timothy before, anyway, so it would have been no trouble at all to fool him.”

Sandy’s jaw was sagging. “Whew!” he said softly, after a moment. “I never thought of that.” He cut off a bite of steak and began to chew it, but for the third time that day his interest in food had evaporated. “You know,” he said finally, “I think you ought to tell the State Police what you’ve just told me.”

“I don’t,” Ken said. “They listened to our ideas on the subject last night, and did something about them. By now, they’re either convinced we were wrong and won’t listen to us any more—or they’ve figured things just the way I did, and they’re going on with their investigation in their own way. In either case, I don’t think they’ll even discuss the subject with us. If they really think that there has been a kidnapping, they’re not likely to tell any reporters about it—even the reporters who put them on the trail.”

“If we could only get in to see Timothy ourselves,” Sandy said, “we’d know right away whether the boy in that bed is the real thing or a substitute.”

“And that’s something we can’t possibly do until Walsh gives the word,” Ken reminded him.

“I know,” Sandy agreed. “We can’t force our way in. Even the police couldn’t do that.” He shook his head. “I certainly hope you’re right that the police have figured out the same possibility you did, and that they’re doing something about it. But if they haven’t, and if Timothy really was kidnaped, somebody ought to be doing something!”

“Well,” Ken said slowly, “I’ve got an idea of something I think we could do ourselves. When you’ve finished—”

“I’ve had enough,” Sandy assured him. “Let’s get out of here.” He raised his voice above the whisper in which their conversation had been carried on and called for the check.

Neither of the boys spoke again until they were out in the car. “All right,” Sandy said, settling himself behind the wheel. “What’s the idea?”

“Head toward Crag’s End,” Ken told him. “I’ll explain on the way.”

Sandy started the car, swung back onto the highway, and turned in the direction of the little village on the North Shore that they had visited the previous day.

“If there’s been a kidnapping, and it was accomplished by getting

the chauffeur out of the way and putting a man in his place, the people who engineered it had to know exactly when Timothy was coming home and that he was arriving by plane," Ken began.

"Lots of people could have found that out," Sandy interjected, "just by getting confidential with anybody on the staff of the Crandall estate, or with anybody on Walsh's office staff, or—"

"I know," Ken agreed. "We'll never learn anything by working from that angle. But if we concentrate on the chauffeur we might get somewhere. If somebody was going to take his place, he'd want to keep the real chauffeur under observation for quite a while, to learn how he walked and talked and so forth, so that he could fool Walsh or Brooks, say, from a distance at least. He probably couldn't get inside the Crandall estate to do that, so it seems to me he would have tried to hang around the places the chauffeur goes on his time off. If we find out where those places are, we might learn something. If there's been a stranger hanging around any of those places recently, somebody might have noticed him. After all, Crag's End is a small place and strangers would be noticeable there."

"Good idea," Sandy approved. "Worth trying, anyway."

For the rest of the trip they discussed possible ways and means of tracking down any stranger who might have visited the village of Crag's End recently, and when Sandy drove into the big gas station at the main village crossing, they were ready with at least a tentative plan of action. They parked the car off to one side, where it wouldn't block the pumps, and hurried inside the garage.

The only occupant of the oil-redolent place was a young man, seated at a desk in one corner, eating a sandwich and drinking coffee from a thermos bottle. He started to his feet at sight of them. "Want gas? Didn't hear you drive up."

"No," Ken told him. "Go on with your lunch."

"If you're selling instead of buying," the man said, settling down again, "I can't help you. You'll have to wait for the boss. He's out to lunch now, but he went early today and he'll be back in"—he glanced up at the clock above his head, which read eleven-thirty—"in half an hour."

"We're not selling anything," Ken said. He'd been pulling off his gloves to get at his press card and now he handed it over. "We've been trying to get an interview with young Timothy Crandall."

"Oh." The man handed back the press card with a sympathetic grin. "Well, I can imagine you're not getting anywhere. But I can't help you. Never even saw the kid."

"We're certainly not getting anywhere," Sandy spoke up. "Haven't even got inside the gate. So we're trying to whip up some kind of background story instead."

Ken picked it up. "We thought maybe the Crandall chauffeur got his gas and oil in here," he explained, "and that if we hung around awhile we might run into him. We figured that we might persuade him to give us a quote or two on what it feels like to drive for the world's youngest millionaire."

The man laughed. "Hanging around here for that would be a waste of time, believe me," he said. "Pat Malloy comes in here regularly, sure, but he's got a mouth with a built-in zipper when it comes to talking about the Crandalls. I've known him for ten years -and not just in here, either; we play on the same bowling team-and I've never yet heard him say a single word about the family or what goes on at the house." He swallowed some coffee. "Anyway, he probably doesn't know the kid. Malloy is Luke Crandall's driver."

Ken flashed Sandy a quick look as the man bent over to take another bite of his sandwich. "So he's a bowler?" he remarked casually.

"Pretty good one too," his informant assured him, grinning. "Gets plenty of practice. We play two nights a week all winter-Tuesdays and Fridays."

"Right here in town?" Ken asked. "Does Crag's End have bowling alleys?"

The man grimaced. "Town's zoned against all amusements. But the Sunset Alleys are right beyond the village limits, just west of here." He put the last of his sandwich in his mouth. "So, as I say," he added, "you're welcome to hang around here, but it won't do you any good. Even if Pat happened to come in today, you wouldn't get so much as a word out of him."

"Well, in that case," Ken said, feigning discouragement, "I guess we'd better take off. Maybe we can think of a more practical idea."

"I wish you luck," the young man said, as they moved toward the door. "But you've got a tough assignment. The Crandalls have always kept to themselves. Don't think you'll find anybody in town who can tell you much about the kid."

"Thanks, anyway," Ken told him, and Sandy echoed the words.

"Next stop Sunset Bowling Alleys?" Sandy asked, as he flipped the switch of the car.

"Right," Ken agreed. "It's a better lead than I thought we'd get so soon. A bowling alley ought to be a fine place for hanging around and observing Pat Malloy."

They found the building with little trouble, a large white cement structure just west of Crag's End. At that hour of the morning they half expected it to be closed, but the door opened under Ken's hand and the man sweeping the floor inside answered their question before they asked it.

"If you're lookin' for the boss," he said, "he's back there." His broom handle pointed toward a door marked: OFFICE.

Ken rapped on the panel. A gruff voice said, "Come in," and they entered a small room half-filled by a large desk. Behind it, looking up at them with frank curiosity, sat a round-faced, middle-aged man. Bright ceiling lights made his bald head glisten, and illuminated the dozens of photographs of bowlers and bowling teams with which the walls were covered.

"I don't suppose you want to bowl at this hour of the morning," the man said cheerfully. "So you must be after something else. What is it? Take your time," he added, his perfectly round face widening still further in a smile. "It's always kind of lonesome here in the morning, so I don't mind sitting around talking."

Ken grinned back at him, produced his press card once more, and repeated his formula. "We've been trying to interview Timothy Crandall, but so far we haven't been able to get past that gate."

"Oh. So that's it." The man looked disappointed. "Now that's a subject I can't discuss with you very long, boys. I just don't know anything about it."

"Doesn't Malloy, the Crandall chauffeur, keep you posted on the family's affairs?" Ken asked innocently. "We understand he bowls here."

"He does that," their host agreed. "Pat's a good customer of mine. But as a conversationalist-no. Pat just doesn't talk, except about bowling, that is. Never even let on the boy was coming to Crag's End, if you can believe that! I didn't know anything about it until I saw this." A fat finger tapped a reproduction of Sandy's photograph on the front page of a New York daily.

"That's a swell picture, isn't it?" Ken gestured toward Sandy. "This is Allen of Global News, who took that shot."

"That so? Now that's interesting." The man beamed.

"You've got some mighty good pictures here on your walls," Sandy told him. "Mind if I look at them?"

"Not at all. Be proud to have you. A few of them are pretty good at that. Monotonous though, of course-just one bowling team after another." Then he brightened. "But I'll have some better ones up there one of these days. Chap took them here not long ago-got some real life into some of them." He was suddenly rummaging in a cluttered desk drawer. "Yes, sir. Good lively shots." His hand closed over a yellow envelope of the variety commonly used for film and photographic prints. "Say," he said suddenly, "you may know the man who took them, come to think of it. He was a New York photographer too -Larry Jones."

"I don't believe I do," Sandy said politely, still running his eyes

over the dozens of prints on the walls in an effort to pick out a face that resembled the one he had seen the day before. "Where does he work?" he added.

"He does things for magazines," the bowling-alley proprietor said. "Never heard of him myself, but this stuff is good. Don't you think so?" He had upended the envelope and allowed a dozen post-card size photographs to spill out onto his desk. "These are for a picture-story, he told me, he's doing about bowling as a family recreation." He held out one print. "Now this one of Malloy and Chet Rice, who works at a gas station near here-don't you think this is real lively? And these too?"

Ken tried to move casually toward the desk and Sandy made an equal effort to pick up the four photographs with nothing more than a show of professional interest. "Mmm," he said. "Not bad."

Three of the pictures showed the two men full length, ready to send heavy balls down adjoining alleys. The fourth was a close-up of their two heads, turned in three-quarter profile so that their gaze was on a Scoreboard.

"Fine shots," Ken said. He took the fourth picture from Sandy and put it on the desk alongside Sandy's own news photo. "See? You'd better look to your laurels. He's as good as you are, I'd say-if not better."

"He's good all right," Sandy admitted.

But neither of the boys was comparing the merits of the two pictures. Instead, they were looking rapidly back and forth from the bowling-alley shot of Malloy to Sandy's picture of the man driving the Crandall limousine. Except for the fact that the latter wore dark glasses and a uniform cap, the two appeared identical to Ken. He was frantically asking himself what that signified, so far as his own theory was concerned, when the telephone in the little office shrilled noisily.

"Excuse me," the proprietor said, picking up the instrument.

Sandy jerked his head at Ken with a movement that meant "Follow me," and then moved to a corner of the room where a low-hanging light illuminated a glass-doored trophy cabinet. There Sandy pretended to study the photographs again, more carefully. But under his breath he said to Ken, "You were right. Look! Malloy's ears are pointed. The 'chauffeur' who drove Timothy yesterday has flat curves at the top of his ears. They're not the same man!"

CHAPTER VII

A HUNCH PAYS OFF

"You're sure?" Ken's startled whisper, louder than he intended, coincided with the end of the bowling-alley proprietor's telephone conversation. Suddenly aware that he had been overheard Ken covered up with a quick, "You're sure these were taken with a thirty-five millimeter camera?"

"Positive," Sandy said, his eyes meeting Ken's briefly to let him know that he was answering the first of Ken's two questions. Then he went on, turning back toward their host, "And they're certainly good shots under the circumstances."

The man behind the desk laughed. "I guess you know your business, too," he said cheerfully, "to be able to tell what kind of a camera he used, just from looking at the pictures. I asked that fellow, Larry Jones, about his camera, just to be polite-don't know one from another myself-and that's what he told me. Yes, sir, thirty-five millimeter he said."

Ken silently applauded his luck at having said the right thing, while Sandy said, "Fine job. Did he take some in color too?"

"Glad you reminded me of that!" the man said in answer. "He did take some color shots and they ought to be turning up any day now. He said they'd take three weeks to get back from the laboratory. Let's see. He took them the second day he was here. Yes, he ought to be getting those pictures back along about now-today or tomorrow, I'd guess. And he said he'd bring them around when they came in. Nice of him, wasn't it? Thought I might buy a few-if he doesn't give me some, that is."

"Speaking of buying pictures," Sandy said, as if struck by a sudden thought, "it just occurs to me that I ought to take Larry Jones' address. Global News sometimes buys stuff by free-lance photographers and they might want to use some of his. Do you know where our office could reach him?"

"Now that's a funny thing!" The man looked surprised. "It never occurred to me until this moment, but I don't have his address. Not even his phone number. Tell you what I'll do, though. When he drops in here to show me those color pictures I'll ask him to get in touch with you. How about that?"

"Fine," Sandy said easily. "It's just an idea, of course. Nothing may come of it. But we do like to keep a file of reliable free-lance photographers." He picked up the envelope which had held the black-and-white prints and then put it down again. "I thought his address

might be on there, but it isn't-only his name. So if you'll ask him to call me-Sandy Allen at Global News Service-we may be able to do each other some good." Then he glanced at Ken to signal that so far as he was concerned they had obtained all the information they would get at the Sunset Alleys.

Ken picked up the clue. "Well," he said to the beaming man behind the desk, "we won't take up any more of your time. I gather it wouldn't do us any good even if Malloy himself walked in here now."

"Not a bit of good," the man agreed. "Malloy just doesn't talk. Nice fellow otherwise. Mighty nice. Don't hurry off, though. I've got plenty of time myself."

Ken managed a cheerful grin. "We haven't, unfortunately. If we're going to round up any kind of a story today we'd better get moving."

"Well, glad you came in. Broke up the monotony of my morning. Come back again some time."

They thanked him gratefully and walked out of his office and out of the building at a normal rate. But Ken didn't even notice the bitter cold wind that tore at them as they raced for their car.

"Proof!" he said, slamming the door decisively. "We've got it! Now-" Then he stopped. "No, we haven't got it," he contradicted himself. "Without that picture to show, alongside your own shot, we can't prove a thing." He reached for the door handle. "Do you suppose-?"

Sandy shook his head. "No. I don't suppose he'd sell or loan us that picture-not without asking a lot of questions we don't want to answer." He was taking a piece of paper and a pencil from his pocket as he spoke, and now he scribbled down a few words.

"What's that?" Ken wanted to know.

"Name and address of the New York City drugstore that printed those shots. I got it from the envelope," Sandy explained. "If that Larry Jones isn't a phony I'll eat my own camera. I think he was taking those photographs as the first step in finding and making up a substitute to take Pat Malloy's place yesterday. Where is Caslon Street, anyway? Way downtown?"

"South of Greenwich Village," Ken answered automatically. "But-!"

"Right. Let's go then." Sandy flicked on the switch and started to back out of the parking lot. "Be faster to leave the car at your father's apartment, wouldn't it, and take a subway downtown?"

The car was headed toward New York before he finished speaking.

"Yes, it would," Ken agreed. "The trouble is that the drugstore probably won't have his address, anyway."

"It probably won't," Sandy admitted. "But somebody there may remember enough about the man to help us track him down. And this isn't just a hunch about Jones being a phony. First of all, if he's what

he said he was, why would he come all the way out to Crag's End to do a story about bowling? There are dozens of alleys closer to the city. Secondly, he says it will take him three weeks to get his color prints back, but any real professional free-lancer knows you can get color prints made in a New York laboratory in less than a week. He probably took color shots to help make up the phony Malloy, but he has no intention of ever giving prints to the bowling alley. And third, no real professional would take his film to a drugstore to be developed."

"But you've sent your own stuff out sometimes," Ken reminded him.

"Sure, but not to a drugstore," Sandy pointed out. "If I don't have time to do them myself, I at least take them to a laboratory where I know the technicians will be as careful as I would be. Drugstore work just isn't up to professional standards."

Ken thought over Sandy's reasoning while the redhead guided the car skillfully around a slow-moving station wagon. "All right," he said finally, "I'll buy that theory." He glanced at his watch, and when he spoke again, excitement quickened his voice. "It's a long shot, but I don't have a better idea. And we can't sit around doing nothing while Timothy may be—" He left the sentence unfinished and said, "Twelve-fifteen now. If you can get past that truck up ahead, and if we don't have any other delays, we ought to make the apartment by one-thirty and be downtown at that drugstore by two."

"Right." But the road was a narrow one and Sandy had to crawl along behind the truck for nearly a mile before he was able to slide around between it and the stream of oncoming cars. Two minutes later he found himself boxed in again behind a tractor lumbering slowly along on its great rubber tires. "At this rate," he muttered, "we could do better walking."

Once on the parkway, however, they were able to make up a little of the lost time. Here there were no trucks to slow them up, and the oncoming cars were divided from their own westbound lane by a wide stretch of winter-browned grass. Nevertheless, both Ken and Sandy felt a growing sense of urgency that increased with each minute.

By one o'clock they had covered some fifteen miles. But by that time they had reached a more crowded stretch of parkway, and their speed as they approached the New York City line was steadily reduced.

Suddenly, just as they reached the top of a slight rise, blinking stop lights ahead of them brought the convertible to a dead stop. They could see ahead for almost half a mile and involuntarily they both groaned. The city-bound lanes were jammed solidly with cars—motionless cars.

“We’ll be here the rest of the day!” Ken said impatiently.

Sandy deliberately unclenched his gloved hands from around the wheel. “Sometimes these breakdowns get cleared away pretty fast,” he said, with an effort toward patience.

Just then a siren screamed somewhere behind them and a minute later a police squad car passed, heading toward the city on the wrong side of the road. A wrecker followed close in its wake.

“See?” Sandy said. “Whatever is holding us up ought to be out of the way pretty soon now.”

Normally the wait would have seemed brief to them, but today every minute that went by added to their nervous tension. Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes dragged interminably past, and the massed lines of cars ahead were still unmoving.

It was one-thirty when Sandy’s fingers closed around the ignition key and turned it on. “At the next break in the oncoming traffic,” he announced grimly, “I’m going to cut across the grass divider and head back the other way. We’ll take the first exit off the parkway we come to and-“

“Don’t try it!” Ken broke in. “It’s not only dangerous-it’s the worst traffic violation on the books around here. If we’re picked up for it, we could be held up for hours until-“

“They’re moving!” Sandy exclaimed.

It was true. Far up ahead they could see the cars in the right lane starting forward at long last. After a few moments they halted again, and then the cars in the left lane began to move.

Sandy had the convertible in motion almost before the driver ahead had released his brake, but he had to stop again some fifty feet later.

“One-way traffic up ahead,” he muttered. “We’re going to have to take turns until we’ve passed the breakdown. But at least the worst is over.”

The right lane moved and halted. The left lane moved again. For almost a full half-hour their progress was marked by agonizing stops and starts. It was two o’clock when Sandy opened his window wide, stuck his head far out, and reported that he could now actually see the police car and the wrecker up ahead. It was two-fifteen by the time they finally passed the scene of the accident that had caused the delay.

Beyond that point the traffic moved forward steadily again, but even so, the crowded condition of the road made the pace maddeningly slow. When Ken paid the bridge toll his watch said two-forty-five. Another half-hour went by before they leaped out of the car in the parking lot and raced toward the subway station.

An express roared to a stop just as they clattered to the foot of the

stairs.

“First stroke of luck we’ve had since we left Crag’s End,” Sandy panted, sinking into a seat.

Ken nodded silently.

The doors slid shut and the train was in motion. One by one the local stations appeared and disappeared again as it roared southward. Ken and Sandy were both on their feet before it came to a stop in the Forty-second Street station, and with Ken in the lead they negotiated the shuttle that took them cross-town to Grand Central Station. Again Ken led the way through the maze of underground passageways beneath that structure to the downtown platform of the Lexington Avenue subway.

Several minutes later the boys were jamming themselves aboard another crowded express train which rattled its way down to Fourteenth Street. There, after an impatient wait, they caught a local train and rode it two stations farther. Daylight was already fading when they tore up a final flight of stairs and emerged once more on ground level.

“Five minutes to four,” Sandy muttered, glancing at his watch. “Two hours later than we figured.”

Ken was glancing from right to left to get his bearings. “Come on,” he said. “Caslon Street must be the next block south.”

It was a dingy rather narrow street. Trucks lining either curb suggested that most of the thoroughfare’s buildings were being used as warehouses. So did the fact that although most of the structures had obviously once been private houses, they now, in most cases, had boarded up windows and the blank, almost abandoned air of places no longer fit for human habitation.

The boys walked a full block westward before Ken said, “There it is-halfway to the next corner.” His eyes had caught sight of the words “Enterprise Pharmacy” on a sign above the sidewalk-words formed of electric bulbs, many of which were burned out. “You’re the photographer, so you’d better do the talking. But just how are you going to go about trying to learn Jones’ address?” he added, as they hurried the last few hundred feet to their destination.

“I’ll play it by ear when we see what kind of spot we’re in,” Sandy said.

The Enterprise Pharmacy was as decrepit as the neighborhood in which it stood. The displays behind its grimy show windows looked dull and faded, as if they had not been renewed for several years. Even the glass in the upper half of the doorway was covered with the accumulated soot and dirt of many months, so that the interior of the store was almost concealed to anyone passing by along the cracked sidewalk.

The boys pushed open the door and stepped inside. The cluttered little store looked much the way they had expected it to from the neglected state of its windows. The marble top of the small soda fountain on one side had not been scrubbed recently, and the metal spigots behind it were tarnished. Cardboard cartons of merchandise stood open but unpacked beneath the half-filled shelves that lined the opposite wall. The worn linoleum-covered floor was gritty underfoot.

The shop's one attendant was a thin, tired-looking clerk, perched on a stool behind the counter at the back of the room. His shoulders were hunched over a newspaper, which he had propped against the small discolored sign that said: PRESCRIPTIONS. He glanced up when the boys entered, but he made no effort to leave his perch and he didn't speak.

"We're looking for someone and we think maybe you can help us," Sandy said, moving toward the back of the store with Ken at his heels. "A photographer named Larry Jones," he added.

"Don't know anybody by that name." The clerk's voice was thin and disinterested, and he kept his newspaper open before him as if he hoped he would soon be left alone to return to it. "What makes you think I would?"

"You recently developed and printed some films for him," Sandy explained.

The man's shoulders lifted and dropped in a weary shrug. "Look, pal," he said, "a man brings film in here, what happens? I take it. I write his name on an envelope and put the stuff inside. A few days later he comes by to pick it up. He tells me his name, then I hand him the envelope that's got his name on it. Half the time I don't even look at him. He pays me and that's all there is to it—a pure and simple business transaction. I don't ask him where he lives. I don't care."

Sandy had pulled out his press card and now he held it so the clerk could read it.

The man's expression didn't change. "What am I supposed to do now?" he asked sardonically. "Act impressed?"

Sandy grinned, but he shoved his hands into his pockets to conceal the angry clenching of his fists. "I don't know why you should be," he said. "I was just going to explain that the reason we're looking for Jones is that we may want to buy some of the pictures he's taken."

"It makes no difference to me why you're looking for him. I still can't help you."

"I suppose it's too much to expect that you'd remember all your customers," Sandy said. "But maybe if I tell you about some of the pictures he left here you might recall—"

"I don't look at the customers. I don't look at their pictures."

"I suppose not, ordinarily," Sandy agreed readily. "But I know how

it is when somebody wants enlargements made, as I happen to know Larry Jones did. You realize, the same way I do"- Sandy put a confidential photographer-to-photographer note into his voice-"that lots of people just don't understand that some pictures won't enlarge well at all. That's why I figured you'd have looked at the stuff in this case, to be able to advise the customer whether his negatives were good enough for enlarging or not."

"You can say that again, pal-about lots of people not knowing anything about the kind of negatives that will make enlargements." For the first time there was real life in the clerk's voice and more than a flicker of interest in his thin face. "They bring in the fuzziest little negatives you ever saw, and then expect us to make up nice sharp eight-by-ten prints out of them! What kind of pictures did this Jones character leave here?"

"Bowling-alley shots," Sandy answered. "Mostly group pictures, but a couple of close-ups."

"Thirty-five millimeter stuff," Ken added, hoping that once more the phrase would prove lucky.

"Sure!" The sudden word galvanized both boys with new hope, but neither of them broke the short silence that followed it. "Sure-a couple of weeks ago, I think it was," the clerk went on finally. "We don't get much thirty-five millimeter stuff here and that's why I remember it. He left the roll one day-said he was in a big hurry, I remember-and came back the next day for the prints. Then, later that same day, he comes dashing in again and says he wants enlargements." The hunched shoulders had straightened up as he talked, but now they slumped again. "Didn't even remember his name, though, when you said it was Jones. So I certainly can't tell you where he lives or anything."

"Was he a big husky guy-about my size?" Sandy asked, trying not to let his bitter disappointment show in his voice.

"No-little skinny fellow. I do remember that. Come to think of it he had bright red hair, sort of like yours. Same color as the red stripe in a real loud sports jacket he was wearing. And he had a crooked nose-I remember that too. I figured he'd got it in a fight and I wondered why a little runt like that would ever get into a fight in the first place." Then once more the clerk shrugged. "But that's the end of what I know about him. He probably doesn't live around here-not many people do any more. He could be working in one of the warehouses down the street, of course. I wouldn't know about that. Don't know how you'd find out, either."

"I see. Well-" The words dragged. Sandy could think of no further way to prod the clerk's memory.

And then suddenly the man said, "But if he doesn't live around

here he must work in the neighborhood, come to think of it-and pretty close by too."

"You're sure?" Ken's voice croaked as he said the words.

"Sure I'm sure. It's been real cold for a month, hasn't it?" the clerk demanded with apparent irrelevance. And when the boys nodded blankly, he went on, "So if I told you he had a loud sports jacket on, how would I have known that if he'd been wearing an overcoat? Get it?" Now the thin face cracked in a grin and Ken and Sandy grinned back at him.

"Of course!" Sandy said. "He must have come from somewhere close by, or he'd have worn a coat."

"That's the idea." Unexpectedly the clerk laughed out loud. "Funny thing what you can remember when you try, isn't it? I just now thought of something else. I remember saying to this character that he'd probably get pneumonia and he says no he won't-he only ran in from around the corner."

"'Around the corner,'" Sandy repeated. He grinned again, though this time not quite so enthusiastically. "Well, thanks. We may not be able to find him with such an indefinite address, but at least it's a help. And we're mighty grateful to you."

"We certainly are," Ken agreed. "If Jones should happen to come in again," he added, to lend color to Sandy's original story, "you might ask him to get in touch with Allen at Global News, just in case we don't track him down in the meantime."

"Sure," the clerk said. "I'll do that."

They thanked him once more and headed for the door.

"Might as well call Dad from here and let him know we're back in town and what we're doing," Ken murmured as they neared the door.

"O.K.," Sandy agreed. "But what are we doing?" he added in a dispirited tone. Like Ken he was only too aware that the phrase "around the corner," spoken by the mysterious Larry Jones, might be nothing more than a figure of speech.

"Following your hunch," Ken told him. And when Sandy eyed him suspiciously, Ken added, "I'm serious. It's worth a little more time, now that we're down here, to walk around the neighborhood. Who knows? We might even run into a small, skinny red-haired guy with a crooked nose and a loud sports jacket."

"Hah! When your father hears what we're doing he'll think we're crazy."

But when Ken came out of the musty phone booth a few minutes later, and they had once more said good-bye to the clerk and emerged onto the sidewalk, Ken said, "Neither Dad nor Granger was in the office. So I just left word as to where we were calling from and said we'd be back at Global in half an hour."

“And now what do we do?” Sandy demanded. “Walk around the corner?” He gestured westward toward the one nearest the Enterprise Pharmacy.

“Why not?” Ken asked. “It’s worth a try. It’s even worth walking around all four corners he might have meant, if he was speaking the literal truth.”

They turned up their collars against the cold and strode wordlessly past the battered buildings that lay between the pharmacy and the next cross street. Truckers unloading or loading their vehicles were the only people abroad in the late afternoon, already almost completely dark, and there were fewer of them than there had been a quarter of an hour earlier. Caslon Street was not popular with casual pedestrians.

“We’ll turn here and walk all the way around the block,” Ken said when they reached the corner. “And then we’ll walk around the block opposite the pharmacy. After that ...” He didn’t finish the sentence because they both knew that after that there would be nothing left to do except return empty-handed to the Global News Building.

The street they turned into was very much like the one they had just left, except that it was less busy.

Only a few trucks were parked along the curb, and only a few of the old residences appeared to be in use either as shabby habitations or as business buildings. Others had been entirely abandoned. One old building was actually in the process of being torn down, and an empty lot beyond it proved that a wrecking crew’s labors there had already been completed except for the clearing up of a layer of rubble.

Sandy eyed the passenger car parked at the far end of the empty lot and wondered briefly why a driver would risk his tires on such dangerous terrain. A moment later he was standing stock-still in the middle of the uneven sidewalk.

Ken took two strides before he realized that his friend was no longer beside him. “What’s up?” he asked swiftly, swinging around. “Did you see-?”

“Look at that car,” Sandy said quietly. “The one at the back of the lot. Does it look familiar to you?”

Ken’s eyes strained through the dusk. Even the rays of a street lamp not far away told him nothing more than that the car was a convertible of medium size and dark color.

“When the Crandall limousine came tearing out through that gate at the airport yesterday,” Sandy was saying, “there was-“

“The convertible! The one that slowed down to let the Crandall car pass!” Ken put his hand on Sandy’s arm and began to walk him back in the direction from which they had come. “Let’s keep moving while we talk,” he muttered. “You really think that’s the same car?”

“It’s the car we saw at the airport!” Ken exclaimed.

“It could be,” Sandy said. “I’m certainly not sure, but the one yesterday was green and this one looks green too.”

“But I don’t get-Wait!” Ken’s fingers tightened on Sandy’s elbow. “It looked yesterday as if the driver of the Crandall limousine was taking a terrific chance, because he couldn’t know the convertible would slow up in time to avoid a crash. But suppose the driver of the limousine knew perfectly well the convertible would slow up-suppose the whole maneuver had been planned so that the convertible would be able to follow the limousine-“

“To follow it?” Sandy repeated. “To act like a rear guard, you mean?”

“Something like that.”

“Then-“

“Exactly,” Ken said. His voice was barely a whisper. “If that is the same green convertible, this may be the neighborhood Timothy was brought to.”

From somewhere in the near distance came the ordinary everyday sound of a truck motor. But somehow it seemed to Ken and Sandy that they were suddenly alone in a dark and unpopulated wilderness.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GRINNING TIGER AGAIN

Sandy's breath was coming rapidly. "Let's get help -fast! Jones was hanging around Crag's End and he's been in this neighborhood too. That car was at the airport yesterday, and now it's *here*. Those two things, added to Brooks' lie about the identical limousines, ought to convince Hotchner that something is definitely wrong, in spite of what Walsh told him and in spite of his man having seen a boy in Timothy's bed. If the police throw a cordon around this whole section--"

Ken stopped him. "That's what they'd have to do, and that's asking a lot, especially since we couldn't prove either of those conclusions. So at least let's get the license number of that car before we call them. The police can check up on it in a couple of minutes and find out where the owner was yesterday when the plane came in."

"That makes sense."

Together, they turned back once more toward the empty rubble-paved lot.

They had just reached it when Ken, eyeing the newly exposed side wall of the old building that rose on its farthest boundary, suddenly jerked Sandy to a halt. "Look up there-at that window," he muttered, pointing. "Something bright just flashed behind it."

Sandy raised his eyes toward the small window. It was high up, inside the angle of the peaked roof, and it was the only one on that side of the structure that was not boarded over, apparently because it was too high to be easily accessible. The four small panes were grimy and the light behind showed through only dimly.

"'Something bright?' " Sandy repeated curiously. "I don't see anything bright about that light, or anything flashing either. What-There! Now I see what you mean!"

The dim yellow glow had been momentarily traversed by a flash of brighter, more intense light, that disappeared almost as quickly as it had appeared.

"Looked as if somebody was waving a lighted flashlight around," Sandy added.

"Not to me," Ken disagreed, as they stood side by side staring upward, waiting for a repetition of the curious moving brilliance. "It looked to me as if somebody was moving a small mirror around in front of the window, so that it caught the light from the street lamp every time it passed exactly the right spot."

"That could be it," Sandy admitted, eyes still glued to the window.

"Remember how Timothy's letters sounded-all excited about

‘detektives’?” Ken asked suddenly. “Don’t they suggest that if he got into trouble he’d go right to work trying to figure out some way to send signals? Like that maybe?”

“I bet you’re right! That’s just what he’d do!”

For an instant the boys turned to look at each other, and then their eyes were drawn back once more to the window and Sandy said, “Look! Doesn’t there seem to be a thin shadow waving back and forth behind the glass-like a long stick or a thin umbrella or something?”

“Yes! I see what you mean!” Ken was shivering now inside his heavy jacket-not with the cold, but with the thought of young Timothy courageously playing “detektive,” perhaps without more than the slightest understanding of the deadly peril he was in. “If the window’s high above his head, he’d have to use a stick or something to lift the mirror up to it,” Ken murmured, unaware that he was speaking now as if he knew definitely that Timothy were behind that high ill-lighted window in the old house.

Sandy’s answer indicated that he too was making the same assumption. “If that’s really a mirror he’s using, it could act like a periscope too, if he happened to hold it right. Here! Let’s do something to attract his attention. Maybe he’ll see us!” He jerked open his jacket, pulled a pencil-slim flashlight out of his pocket, and waved it back and forth overhead.

Ken grabbed it out of his hand. “Hold still,” he commanded. “He’d be most likely to recognize your red hair.” And he aimed the beam at Sandy’s bright thatch.

“If we could risk yelling at him-” Sandy muttered.

“That would be crazy.” Ken moved the light from left to right and then brought it back to Sandy again. “If Timothy really is up there, he probably isn’t alone in the house. I noticed when we first came along here that there were no lights showing in the front of the place, but that doesn’t mean there aren’t at least a couple of people in there guarding him.” He had kept his voice low, as they had both instinctively done for the past several minutes.

Sandy answered him almost in a whisper, acutely aware of the finger of light that now seemed to him as obvious as an airport beacon. “We can’t do this all night. If Timothy’s really up there and sees us, he’ll figure out fast enough that we’re looking for him. Our next job is to go for help.”

“Right.” Once more Ken waved the light, as an attention-attracting device, and then focused it on Sandy again. “We’ll check the license of that convertible, and then one of us will head for the nearest phone. We-“

They both jumped uncontrollably at the sound of crashing glass overhead. Ken, seeing Sandy’s eyes widen, spun around and looked up

at the window. Now one of its four square panes was starred with a jagged hole.

Sandy had started to move forward even as Ken turned. A tiny object was arcing through the air, glinting as it fell, and Sandy was streaking toward the place where it seemed likely to land. Ken ran after him.

Sandy almost caught the object as it neared the ground, but he overstepped the spot. An instant later Ken scooped something up from where it lay shining among the rubble.

"It's the grinning tiger I threw to Timothy yesterday!" he gasped as Sandy pivoted around to look at the small object.

Ken held the flashlight on it for an instant, and then they both turned to look upward at the broken window through which the small silver animal had been flung.

"Good boy!" Ken breathed unsteadily. He sucked in his breath. "O.K.," he said swiftly. "Now let's--"

He broke off as abruptly as if he'd been struck. The blaze of light that suddenly enveloped them had the impact of a stunning blow. Dazed and blinking, the boys turned toward its source—a high-powered flashlight pointed directly at them from a spot near the front corner of the old house.

A rough voice barked a command from behind the light. "Don't move! You're covered!"

For a moment the boys were held paralyzed by the voice and the blazing light. Then Sandy grabbed Ken's wrist, knocking the tiny flashlight out of his hand, spun around, and started on a zigzagging run for the rear end of the vacant lot. Even as Ken stumbled after him he realized that their wild dash was worth the risk. If they could evade the light long enough to lose themselves in the maze of interlocking back yards that filled the center of the block, they might still be able to get help for Timothy.

They had covered half the length of the lot, aware of the long beam of light stabbing the air behind them, illuminating the ground around them briefly and then losing them again, when another light struck them full in the face.

"Stop!" a second voice barked. "Stop or I'll shoot!"

They were trapped! The man who had first discovered them was not alone. He had a confederate at the back of the yard.

Momentum alone carried the boys a few steps farther on their erratic course, but this time the light didn't lose them.

Escape was impossible. Now the two lights met at the point where they faltered to a stop.

"Move over this way!" the second voice commanded. "With your hands over your heads!"

“And remember I’ll be right behind you.” As the first voice sounded again, the speaker moved toward them. “Go ahead,” he said, jabbing the beam of his light at them. “Do as you’re told. Walk toward the back of the house.”

Panting from their attempted flight, and from the fury of being captured at the very moment when they had acquired actual proof of Timothy’s whereabouts, Ken and Sandy moved slowly ahead as they had been ordered. One light remained in front of them, backing slowly as they advanced. The other followed behind, and the man carrying it rapidly closed the distance between the boys and himself.

“Got the door open, Andy?” he called softly.

“Sure,” the voice behind the forward light answered. “But you didn’t leave the front door open, did you?”

“What do you take me for? Think I want somebody walking past the place to start wondering why anybody wants a lot of fresh air on a night like this?”

The open door referred to by the man called Andy proved to be a narrow back entrance leading into a cramped, musty-smelling hall in what was apparently the basement level of the house. Andy guided the boys down the two crumbling stone steps that led to the door, and then down the hall, by walking backward just in front of them. One hand held the light he kept trained relentlessly in their eyes. The other held the snub-nosed gun with which he had threatened them outside. The second light, close behind them now, proved how hopelessly they were hemmed in.

“Shut that door behind you, Jerry,” Andy said.

The door banged with a dull thud. “O.K.,” Jerry reported. “Where you taking them?”

“The furnace room first, until we look them over.”

The furnace room, which opened directly off the hall about midway along its length, was a cavern-like, brick-walled place some twenty feet square. Against one wall and under a glaring overhead bulb was a rough table bearing a couple of newspapers, a tin-can lid that had been used as an ash tray, and several crumpled papers which had probably once been wrapped around sandwiches. The only other object in the room, except for two battered wooden chairs, was an old-fashioned, coal-fired steam furnace that wheezed and gurgled noisily.

Ken, aware of the comforting warmth emanating from the blazing coals behind the partially opened furnace door, hoped briefly that some of the heat of the fire was reaching the attic room, four stories above, where Timothy was being held. Then Andy said, “All right. Stand over there against the wall, both of you.” As he and Sandy moved to the spot which Andy indicated with his now-extinguished flashlight, Ken got his first good look at the two men.

Both wore bandanna handkerchiefs tied around their faces just below the eyes, and hats pulled low over their foreheads. It was impossible to tell what they looked like except that the one whose name was Andy was small and slight, and that Jerry, the other man, was much larger.

"Now," Andy said, settling himself comfortably on one of the two chairs and resting his hand on the table in such a way that the gun it held was still pointed directly at the boys. "Now suppose you—"

"Wait a minute, Andy," Jerry said. "That attic window's been busted out. We'd better get that fixed first."

Andy's thin brows—were they reddish in color, Ken wondered, trying to peer beneath the hatbrim—pulled together over his rather small eyes. "How'd they manage that? It's way over their—"

He broke off abruptly, but Ken had already filed away the information Andy's use of the word "they" had given him. Apparently Timothy's governess was being held with him.

Jerry was shrugging. "How would I know? I just know it's smashed. And it's lucky we heard it crash or else we wouldn't have snared these two." He turned to the boys. "And what was it I saw you pick up out there?" he added, as if he had just remembered.

"Yeah—what was it?" Andy wanted to know, his eyes going from Ken to Sandy and back again. When neither of them replied immediately, he said, "Be stubborn if you want to. But if we take the trouble, we can pry any information we want out of you."

Ken's fingers were still clutched around the little grinning tiger. When he and Sandy were searched, as he knew they would be, it would be discovered immediately. He tossed it wordlessly onto the table.

Andy picked it up so that he could hold it before his eyes and study it without removing his glance more than momentarily from the boys.

Did he know it belonged to Timothy? Any revealing expression on either man's face was concealed behind their bandanna masks.

"Are you kidding?" Andy finally demanded. "How would a tin cat get out there?"

"It looks like a tiger good-luck charm to me," Ken told him, his voice as even as he could make it. "Maybe the person who lost it didn't need good luck any longer."

Andy looked at him sharply, as if trying to read some hidden meaning into Ken's words. Then he tossed the little tiger back so quickly that Ken barely caught it. "And maybe you do," he said.

Jerry laughed suddenly, a short, unpleasant laugh.

"I thought you were going to fix that window," Andy reminded him sharply. "Use those boards over there," he added, pointing toward

the remains of a wooden packing case that had presumably been broken up for kindling.

Jerry, apparently accustomed to taking Andy's orders, picked up several of the boards, along with a rusty ax, and disappeared through the door that led out into the hall.

Andy didn't speak immediately after he had gone. He simply sat still, holding his gun trained on the two boys standing against the wall.

"What's this all about?" Ken said finally.

Andy's voice sounded amused as he answered, "Don't you wish you knew!" Then he leaned forward, looking at them more steadily than ever, and said, "All right. Now let's get down to business. Who are you two and what were you doing hanging around here, flashing that light of yours out in the vacant lot?"

Ken's eyes met Sandy's. They both knew that they were going to be searched as soon as Jerry returned. They took their press cards out of their pockets and laid them on the table.

Again Andy held the objects cautiously at eye level so that he could keep his glance on the boys except for swift-flashing looks at the two bits of pasteboard. His mouth tightened as he read them.

When he put them down on the table again he said nothing. He didn't speak until the hall door opened and Jerry reappeared.

"I did a good job," Jerry announced. "Figured we wouldn't be needing both those blankets any more, anyway, so I fastened one up against the window first and put the boards over it. Now there won't be any light showing out of this place at all. You should have thought of that earlier," he added. "Just because that window's high up doesn't--"

"Never mind that now!" Andy snapped. "Look at these." He handed over the press cards.

"Reporters!" Jerry dropped the cards as if they had burned his fingers. "How'd they get here?" He swung toward the boys. "Come on, talk! What're you doing here?"

"You brought us inside!" Sandy snapped.

"Don't get smart with me!" Jerry growled. "What were you doin' out in that vacant lot?"

With some idea of increasing Jerry's already expressed dissatisfaction with Andy's planning, Ken spoke up. "We were just walking by and happened to notice that lighted window," he said. "It made us curious-in a house that appeared to be deserted. So we were just looking around."

"You hear that?" Jerry growled at Andy. "Didn't the boss tell you to be careful? And if a couple of young guys like this would get suspicious, don't you think the cops-?"

"That's enough." Andy's voice was firm.

"That's plenty!" Jerry's short laugh was little more than a bark.

"The only thing we can do now is get out of here-and without wasting any time."

"Don't be a fool," Andy told him. "We'll be out of here in plenty of time. But we're not going to start doing anything on our own with the boss due here in about five minutes. We'll just get these two put away and then let him figure out the next step. Search them, Jerry."

Ken thought, for a moment, that Jerry was going to argue further. But the habit of following Andy's lead seemed to be strong in the bigger man. He strode across the floor.

"Put your hands on your heads!" he growled. Then he explored Sandy's pockets, pausing to remove the small camera Sandy always carried with him, and a penknife. Ken's penknife followed both those objects onto the table.

"O.K.," Andy said. "They don't look very dangerous to me. But I'll go first and cover them from the head of the stairs. You follow them up."

A steep wooden stairs, lighted by a feeble bulb, led upward from the front end of the narrow basement hall. Directly to their left at the head of the flight of steps was an open door.

"Inside," Andy ordered.

Ken and Sandy stepped through into what-from the faint glow of the bulb at the stairhead-appeared to be a room about the size of the one they had left downstairs.

"You could make a lot of noise in there without being heard outside the house," Andy said harshly from the hall. "But we'd hear you and we don't like noise. So don't irritate us. It wouldn't be healthy." Then he banged the door shut and there was the sound of a key squeaking in a rusted lock.

Ken and Sandy were left alone in complete and coffinlike darkness.

CHAPTER IX

PRISONERS

"What dopes we were!" Sandy groaned furiously. And Ken, close beside him in the utter darkness, could feel the redhead's big body tense in every muscle. "If I could just-!" Sandy spun around to face the door that had been locked at their backs, and his hands, flailing wildly through the air, closed around the doorknob. Ken realized what he was doing only when the doorknob rattled under Sandy's frenzied turning.

"Stop that!" Ken said sharply. His own hands found Sandy's and tried to hold them still.

"Cut that out!" Jerry's voice bellowed at them, and his heavy footsteps pounded up the last few stairs of the flight. Apparently the two men had already been on their way back to the basement when the noise of Sandy's violent protest reached their ears. Now Jerry's big fist thudded against the door panel. "Didn't we tell you to keep quiet in there?"

Sandy had stopped rattling the doorknob. He hadn't needed Jerry's reminder. Ken's swift protest had cut short his outburst of impotent rage.

"That's better," Jerry muttered. The blurred quality of his voice, as it reached them, made it clear that the door through which he was speaking was thick and solid. "But just remember not to try that again!"

Ken had to strain his ears to make out the sound of the big man's footsteps as he started down the stairs once more.

Quickly Ken began to speak. He had been in tight spots with Sandy before, and he knew that his friend's first reaction to restraint was always an attempt to use his great strength to batter his way out of trouble. And now, as on certain other occasions in the past, Ken felt that an expenditure of strength was useless until they had explored their situation.

"Let's use our heads," he said quietly. "Even if we did break out of here, it wouldn't do us-or Timothy -any good. I don't think either Andy or Jerry would hesitate to use those guns they carry if we gave them a real excuse. Sure, we were dopes to be caught. But at least we've learned something."

"But what good does it do us to know where Timothy is, if we can't get him out of here?" Sandy demanded.

"Just listen to me a minute!" Ken urged. "Remember I phoned Global from that drugstore and left word where we were and that

we'd be back at the office in half an hour. So if we don't turn up within a reasonable time, Dad or Granger-after all, they know what we're mixed up in-will probably have the police searching this neighborhood with a fine-tooth comb."

"And is it going to help us even if a squad car drives right past this house?"

"It won't help us, if all we've done in the meantime is stand around arguing!" Ken snapped. "But if there's a boarded-up window in this room, and we can manage to get it pried open-After all, Timothy managed to get a signal out to us. We ought-"

Sandy interrupted him. As usual, when he realized that his anger could be channeled into some definite and purposeful activity, he didn't waste time. "Come on, then," he said. "You go around the room that way. I'll go this."

Ken had sensed, before the door had closed on them and while the dim bulb in the hall was partially illuminating the room that had become their prison, that the place was approximately square, and that the entering door stood at about the middle of one wall. Now he moved slowly to the right along that wall, exploring with his fingers every inch of it from the dust-thick baseboard up, as high as he could reach. The surface under his hands was rough to the touch, as if made of plaster many times patched and repaired. But it stretched on without a break to a corner that was a tangle of cobwebs.

Ken flinched when his fingers first encountered the sticky clinging webs, but he brushed them aside and started along the adjoining wall. It, too, proved to be a solid expanse, without door or other opening of any kind.

After Ken turned the second cobwebby corner he moved more carefully than ever. Remembering the location of the room in relation to the stairs leading down to the basement, he was quite certain that it was almost directly above the furnace room in which Andy and Jerry had questioned them. This meant that any window it contained was most likely to be in the wall opposite the door, because that wall was probably part of the outer framework of the house.

Inch by inch, Ken's hands moved along. Sandy was as silent as he was, proving that he too had found no break in the plaster partitions walling the other half of the room.

Suddenly Ken's right hand, stretching out in a wide sweep, struck Sandy's left.

"Nothing!" Sandy said bitterly. "Not even a crack!"

They had met at about the center of the wall opposite the door-they had encircled the entire room -and learned only that it contained no windows at all, not even one that had been boarded over.

Ken groaned. "There's no way out of here except through that

door.”

And trying to break the door down, they both knew, would bring Andy and Jerry up the stairs again, their guns ready for action.

For a long moment neither of the boys spoke. Sandy thudded one clenched fist steadily into the other palm and the softly explosive sound, repeated over and over again, was the only noise in the room.

Finally, the big redhead said, “If we were only a couple of floors higher, we could at least knock on the ceiling to attract Timothy’s attention and let him know we’re here.”

“But we’re not. We’re right over the furnace room, on the first-” Ken stopped abruptly. “Do you suppose,” he went on after a moment, “we could overhear anything of what they’re saying downstairs, if we put our ears to the floor? They mentioned that their boss was coming soon. If we could find out something about their plans, we’d at least know where we stand.”

“Great idea!” the redhead said softly. “Let’s see. That table they were sitting at was to the right of the door when we went in that room. That means we’d be above it over here.” He pulled Ken along with him toward the right-hand wall. “Let’s try it,” he said then, releasing Ken’s arm.

Ken knelt beside him and was about to press his ear against the floor when Sandy whispered, “Listen! I can hear their voices already!”

Ken lowered his head toward the floor, and he too heard the voices almost immediately. Probably faint sounds of the conversation below had been audible all along, but up until then the boys had been concentrating so completely on other things that they had failed to notice them. It was not possible to make out so much as a single word, but the soft hiss and murmur of voices below them was unmistakable.

Ken began to creep slowly around, hoping to bring himself directly above one of the speakers on the chance of making out at least part of the conversation going on in the furnace room. A slight scraping sound nearby told him that Sandy was doing the same thing. The floor was covered with a gritty layer of dust and grime under which was some smooth surface which Ken assumed was linoleum. He was just wondering if it would be useful to rip up a piece of the linoleum, and thus reduce the sound-deadening layers between the two floors, when his exploring finger encountered a crack.

Cautiously he inserted the finger and pulled upward. A small piece of the worn, dry linoleum came up under his hand, bending as easily as if it were blotting paper.

But this was not what made Ken gasp. The break in the linoleum had occurred over what Ken instantly realized must be an unused hot-air register, relic of a heating system abandoned years ago. There was no wooden flooring under the linoleum at that point. There was

simply a framework of thin metal bars set on edge and fitted together in an egg-crate design. Now two of the tiny boxes in the egg crate had been uncovered, providing a small peephole straight down into the basement furnace room. Through it a narrow shaft of light rose upward—a dim yellow column filled with dancing dust motes.

Sandy had gasped too, at the sight of the peephole Ken had contrived. Carefully he moved over the floor to Ken's side, while Ken crouched low to press his eye to the newly made hole.

All Ken could see of the room below was a corner of the battered table with its burden of crumpled papers and an overflowing ash tray. But his inability to see either Andy or Jerry faded into unimportance as Jerry's voice suddenly floated clearly up to him. Ken moved away from the hole so that Sandy could hear too.

"He's ten minutes late already," Jerry was saying.

"Relax," Andy told him. His thinner, sharper voice was just as audible as Jerry's complaining growl. "Anybody could be held up ten minutes-by traffic, by anything."

"He should have figured on traffic," Jerry insisted, "and not promised us he'd be here by five. Suppose he's double-crossing us?" he added suddenly.

"Don't be stupid!" Andy snapped. "He has to come here to pick up the car. How else could he get out to make the ransom money pickup at seven o'clock? Or do you think," he asked sarcastically, "that he'd hire a taxi for a little jaunt like that? Why don't you stop trying to do his thinking for him? You're not cut out for work like that."

"Maybe you're not either," Jerry muttered. "You got us into this—agreeing to do a snatch job for a guy we'd never seen before. A guy who uses the phony name of John Smith!" Jerry laughed his short nasty laugh. "I could at least have picked a better name than that!"

The sound of a striking match told Ken and Sandy, listening tensely above, that one of the men below was lighting a cigarette. And the tone of Andy's voice, when he spoke again, suggested that it was he who had made that deliberately nonchalant gesture.

"I suppose *you* could have planned the whole deal," Andy said.

The sound of footsteps told the boys that he was walking across the room as he spoke and suddenly he came into the line of Ken's vision.

Ken caught his breath. Andy was no longer wearing the mask or the low-pulled hat. It was clear now that his eyebrows were red as Ken had suspected. It was also clear that the man called Andy was the same man who had called himself Larry Jones when he visited the Sunset Bowling Alleys and the Enterprise Pharmacy. His hair was even redder than his brows, and his nose was unmistakably crooked.

Ken pulled Sandy over so that he could see too, and Sandy reacted to the sight by a sudden spasmodic clutch at Ken's arm.

“Oh, sure!” Andy was saying in a deliberately taunting voice. “You’re so smart you could have figured out the way for me to get those photographs, I suppose. You could have planned how to take care of the Crandall chauffeur-right on schedule. And the transfer of the kid to our car.”

“Now, listen-!” Jerry, moving now too, also came briefly within Ken’s range. Ken tried to take careful note of the square face on the thick neck, the straight black hair, the wide, angry mouth.

But Andy was talking again and Ken concentrated on what he was saying. “Why you couldn’t even have located a house like this-or had the sense to sign up for it for a month when we only needed it for a week or so. But you were glad enough to grab your share of that thousand he paid us in advance-not to mention how you’ll grab your half of that fifty grand we get when we meet Smith in Connecticut in exactly”-he paused, as if consulting a watch-“exactly four hours and forty-five minutes.”

“How can he even meet the payoff time-let alone cross the Sound to Connecticut by ten-if he hasn’t got here by now?” Jerry demanded. “You got us into this,” he repeated, “just because he convinced you he was a slick make-up artist and could pull off that chauffeur stunt. But I notice he didn’t give us any of that false hair and face paint he smears on himself! No, we go around with our own faces on-and plenty of people have seen them by now-yours especially. I’m telling you, we’re the ones who are going to get caught short on this deal-the worst crime on the books-one that’ll have all the cops in the country on our trail!”

“Cut it out!” Andy said shortly. “What does it matter if a couple of people have seen us? They’ll never connect us with this business. Anyway, our fingerprints aren’t on file-or our pictures, either.”

“Not yet-no. But-“

“Shh!” Andy cut him off.

On the floor above, bent closely over the tiny hole in the rotted linoleum, Ken and Sandy could also hear the sound that had caught Andy’s attention. It was a series of knocks, two in quick succession, two at longer intervals, and two more quick ones.

“There he is now!” Andy said triumphantly. “That fifty grand is on its way right into our pockets!”

“And how much more is he going to keep for himself?” Jerry growled.

But his footsteps and Andy’s sounded over the cement floor of the furnace room and then became inaudible as the two men apparently moved together into the hall.

Sandy leaned close to Ken and breathed into his ear. “Now we’re going to see the fake Malloy.”

Ken nodded. The amazing conversation they had just heard had supplied a great deal of information about the intricate planning that had gone into the Crandall kidnapping. It had proved that both Andy and Jerry were mere henchmen of the man who called himself John Smith, and who had apparently himself played the role of the Crandall chauffeur at the airport. John Smith was the man they must be particularly careful to study, so that later on when-or if, Ken reminded himself grimly-he and Sandy managed to escape from the old house, they could describe him to the police. Ken backed slightly away from the peephole, so that he could look down through it at an angle directed toward the hall doorway of the furnace room.

At first glance it seemed that the man who strode briskly into his line of vision a moment later could never have substituted successfully for Pat Malloy, whose face had looked markedly thin in his photographs. The newcomer's thick gray hair curled above a plump-cheeked, dark-complexioned face, and his shoulders too were wider than Malloy's had appeared to be. And certainly the sheepskin-lined jacket he wore, the whipcord trousers, and the black hat crushed under his arm, suggested an outdoors type who would find the sport of bowling far too dull for his taste. If Smith had made himself up to look like Malloy, Ken decided, he was certainly a make-up artist, as Jerry had called him, of remarkable ability.

"... thought I'd never get here," the man was saying in a low-pitched voice that was, curiously, resonant enough to carry upstairs even better than Andy's and Jerry's louder-spoken words. "Naturally, I didn't want to use a taxi, so I took the subway and it just crawled along. It's the first piece of bad luck we've had. Hand over the car keys now, so I can get along."

Jerry's voice rose above the jingle of car keys. "That's the second piece of bad luck," he said, as Smith and Andy moved out of range of the boys' vision.

"What's that?" Smith snapped. "What happened?"

"Nothing," Andy said.

"There's no such thing as *nothing* when you're fooling with a kidnapping," Smith said. "What happened?"

"We picked up a couple of reporters snooping around the house," Jerry mumbled.

"They didn't have a chance to tip anybody off," Andy cut in. "We got to them too fast. Don't worry, Smith. Get along and do what you have to do."

CHAPTER X

TOO LATE!

"What?" Smith snapped. "What reporters? What's this all about?"

"Don't worry. It's nothing we can't handle," Andy said swiftly, crossing the room after him. "We ..."

The rest of what he said was inaudible. The three men must have moved out into the hall.

The first thought that crossed Ken's mind was that all three of the men were on their way upstairs to make some new disposition—probably a final and permanent one—of Sandy and himself, or perhaps of Timothy and his governess. Instinctively he sprang to his feet. A faint sound, and a blurry movement visible in the faint glow of light emanating from the beam cast upward through their peephole, told him that Sandy was doing the same thing.

"Now what?" the redhead breathed in a barely audible whisper.

"I don't know," Ken admitted. His mind cast frantically about for inspiration. He and Sandy would be helpless, he knew, against three men all of whom were presumably armed.

Side by side, facing the doorway, they waited.

But nothing happened. Long minutes dragged by and their straining ears could catch no sound of footsteps mounting the stairs.

After what seemed an hour, and was perhaps five minutes, Ken involuntarily let out the breath he felt he had been holding interminably. Deliberately he flexed muscles that had long been tensed while he and Sandy crouched low to eavesdrop on the conversation going on below them. And then the thought occurred to him that all three men had left the house, abandoning its four prisoners to their fate.

Ken grabbed Sandy's arm and said softly, "Maybe they've all gone!"

Sandy seized upon the idea immediately. "In that case, let's get out of here!" He took four long strides that brought him to the door and once more he grabbed the knob to rattle it and test the solidity of the hinges. With his free hand he pounded on the upper panel in an effort to crack it through.

"Stop that!" Jerry's voice bellowing at them through the door an instant later froze both boys into immobility. Because of the noise Sandy had been making they had not heard his approach.

"What did I tell you before?" Jerry raged. "Do you want a bullet through your heads?"

Then something enormously heavy thudded against the hall side of

the door.

"We're going to fix you!" Jerry was saying in a gloating voice.

Andy's quieter, sharper tones could barely be heard through the heavy panels. "Don't talk so much. Let's just get this job done."

Wood scraped on wood. There was the noise of feet on the hallway floor.

"There! That'll hold 'em!" Jerry said finally. Once more he raised his voice. "And remember-we want quiet in there!"

And then two pairs of footsteps could be heard moving down the stairs.

Sandy spoke quickly, "We're done for. They've rammed a plank or something against the door. And anyway, what chance have we got of breaking out if they're going to stay here?"

"We know that they're not going to stay all night," Ken reminded him. "They're going to be at some place in Connecticut by ten to get their share of the money."

"Maybe only one of them will go. If just one of them stays here-with a gun-that would be enough to stop us from leaving here, and getting Timothy out."

Ken didn't answer. He knew Sandy was right.

Soundlessly, on a single impulse, they both moved back to crouch over their peephole again. Jerry and Andy were just entering the room. The boys had a glimpse of them as they crossed the area visible through the old hot-air register, and then they heard the noise of creaking chairs as the two men sat down.

Ken looked at the radium dial of his wrist watch. It was almost five-forty-five.

The next hour, Ken would always think, was one of the longest he had ever lived through. He and Sandy didn't dare speak, for fear the sound would carry through their peephole and inform the men below that they had been overheard. They scarcely dared to move, for the same reason. And in any case they were afraid to leave their post, or to make a sound, for fear they might miss some important bit of information spoken in the room below.

Actually they heard almost nothing. Jerry and Andy seemed to be scarcely on speaking terms. Fifteen-minute intervals would pass without either of them saying a word, and with only the occasional rattle of newspaper or creaking of a chair to prove they were still in the furnace room.

Once Jerry said, "Imagine letting a couple of reporters tumble to this place because you didn't have sense enough to cover up that window!"

Andy responded with a sharp "Shut up! We spotted them before they did any damage."

Jerry didn't answer. Silence fell again.

But some time later Jerry said, "I don't like this business of changing plans in midwater."

"Midstream, you mean, stupid!"

"Well, if you'd used your head--"

"Oh, shut up!" Andy said again. And the silence after that exchange lasted for twenty minutes.

Ken found himself clenching and unclenching his fists. Deliberately he pressed both palms flat on the dusty floor and tried to concentrate on what they must do when-or if, he reminded himself grimly-they escaped from the old house. First, of course, they would release Timothy and his governess. And then ...

Time was moving steadily on. Again Ken found his fists clenched. The ransom money pickup was due to take place at seven o'clock, Andy had said-unless that plan had been changed, which seemed unlikely. Was there a chance that he and Sandy could get out of here in time to forestall that? Or would John Smith get the money, cross to Connecticut-in a private boat, presumably, since no ferries were running across the Sound at that season-share the money with Andy and Jerry, and all three of them be on their way to obscure safety before the police could be alerted?

Ken had the conviction that the men didn't intend to come back to the old house after their Connecticut rendezvous. Probably their plan was simply to leave Timothy and his governess alone in it, until the kidnappers were far enough away to risk a message to Walsh revealing the boy's whereabouts. Or perhaps they never even intended to send such a message at all. Perhaps they planned to leave the boy and the woman to be discovered at some vague future date by the building's owner-and this might not occur until long after the two had died of cold or of starvation.

It was quarter to seven. It was ten minutes to seven. It was five minutes to seven. It was seven.

Now, Ken told himself furiously, John Smith was at this moment picking up the ransom money. It was too late to stop him. The payment of the ransom itself was comparatively unimportant, of course, compared to the safety of Timothy and his governess. But a man who had dared to inaugurate such a heartless plan, and who was probably going to get away with it-

"All right," Andy said suddenly into the silence below them. "Let's go."

Ken and Sandy leaned closer, and for the next few minutes they caught occasional glimpses of the two men buttoning themselves into heavy coats, banging shut the door of the furnace, and generally making preparations for departure. Every sound and movement told

Ken that his deduction had been correct: they did not plan to return to this house.

"Hang on, Tim," Ken said to himself. "We'll have you out of here pretty soon now."

But when the light in the room below them went off, and they could hear the faint sound of a closing door, Ken and Sandy made themselves remain perfectly still for several long minutes. There was always the chance, they realized, that Andy and Jerry might tiptoe upstairs before they left, with the intention of provoking the boys to some desperate move which could then be turned against them.

But finally Sandy said, "I can't stand this. Let's get at that door!"

Ken rose to his feet in answer. "Give it one tap first," he advised, "to make sure nobody's out there."

Sandy struck the door lightly and again they waited. But no slightest noise could be heard in the hall outside.

"All right," Sandy said. "Here we go! This isn't going to be easy. If they've got a plank propped against the door, it means we have to break out the lower panel first and crawl through." He turned his back on the door and lashed out with his right foot, driving the heel against the wood.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The thuds seemed to reverberate through the whole house. Ken thought briefly of Timothy and wondered if he could hear the noise and was frightened by it. And then, when it was his turn to replace Sandy, he forgot everything else in the effort to throw all his strength into the job of breaking out the panel.

Not even a first crack occurred until Sandy was on the job again. And that crack marked the total of their apparent progress for another several minutes.

But suddenly one of Ken's blows drove his heel clear through the door. A small piece of wood had ripped clean out of the panel, leaving a jagged hole behind.

"Here!" Sandy, exultant, shoved Ken out of the way. "Let me get at it. I've got more weight behind me."

But even with Sandy's best efforts another five minutes went by before they decided the hole was big enough for Ken to squeeze through. He could hear his jacket tear on a sharp splinter, but Sandy was shoving him from behind and at last Ken was landing headfirst in the hall. He squirmed out from under the heavy beam angled tightly against the door, grabbed the timber with both hands, and gave a mighty yank. An instant after he dropped it on the floor he had turned the rusty key in the lock and Sandy had joined him outside the room where they had been imprisoned for more than two hours.

They didn't waste time going down to the basement first. There

was no doubt that Andy and Jerry had departed for good, or they would long ago have put a stop to the noise the boys had been making. Instead, feeling his way along the banister, with Sandy right behind him, Ken found the stairs leading upward and began to climb as rapidly as he could in the dark.

At the top of the stairs the banister curved back on itself and led along the hallway to the next flight. The old wood creaked under their feet, but otherwise the house was completely silent. Ken, moving steadily upward, opened his mouth to shout to Timothy, but his throat was dry and no sound emerged.

On the third floor the banister ended.

For a moment complete panic flooded over Ken. Then he told himself firmly that there must be another flight of stairs—that there must be a way to reach the attic above them, with its window through which Timothy had signaled to them at a time that now seemed so long ago. And the stairs to the attic, Ken further reminded himself, probably would be in the same relative position as the other flights they had already climbed.

He turned and walked back along the hall as he had done on the other floors. But at the place where he expected the stairs to be, he came up instead against a wall-like partition.

Frantically he thrust his hands out against it, as Sandy bumped into him from behind. Unexpectedly Ken's right hand touched a round protrusion—a doorknob, he realized it was. "Of course!" He said the words unconsciously, under his breath. He had just remembered that attic stairs were often closed off by doorways.

Ken twisted the knob under his fingers and the door opened. One behind the other they started up the last flight.

But at its top they experienced no sensation of being in a narrow hall, such as they had felt even in the darkness on the lower floors. Here, Ken was quite sure, they were standing in a large room into which the stairs opened directly.

But if the attic consisted of one large room, why wasn't it lighted as they had expected it to be?

"Timothy!" Ken said hoarsely.

And behind him Sandy's voice echoed, "Timothy!"

Silence was their only answer.

Ken started cautiously forward then, aware that the boy and his governess might both be unconscious and that he might injure them if he were to stumble upon them in the dark. As he moved, he explored the air overhead with both hands, in search of the hanging light he assumed must be somewhere in the room.

Suddenly his fingers brushed lightly against something. He reached frantically. And this time his hand closed around a dangling string. He

jerked down on it.

A light bulb suspended from the ceiling sprang to life, illuminating the big, bare room in which they stood. It was empty of furniture. It showed no trace of occupancy. There was no sign of Timothy and his governess, no sign that they had ever been in the room-except for the four fresh boards nailed over a single small window high in one wall.

CHAPTER XI

POLICE NET

The boys stood motionless for long seconds, unable to accept the unmistakable evidence that Timothy and his governess were gone.

"But how-?" Sandy began. "We'd have heard them if they went past our door!"

Ken nodded numbly. Silent as he and Sandy had been, crouched over their peephole, they would certainly have heard some sound of two people being led or carried along the first-floor hall. Even if Timothy and the woman were both unconscious at the time, there would have—

Suddenly Ken snapped out of his shocked immobility. The important thing now, he told himself, was not to solve the puzzle of how the two prisoners had been removed, but to find the place to which they had been taken. And the first step in that direction was to get the police on the kidnappers' trail.

"We've got to hurry. Got to get to a phone." He started back toward the stairs. "Come on!"

They left the light on, still swinging slowly back and forth from the violence of the jerk Ken had given it. It made their shadows waver before them as they raced down the stairs.

But at the foot of the flight Ken paused. A faint glow from overhead now permeated the third-floor hall, and on impulse Ken pushed open the door it revealed just to his right. The darkness beyond was so complete that he could see nothing, but Ken thrust his foot forward until suddenly the floor fell away beneath it. He lowered his foot gingerly and then drew it up again.

"Back stairs," he reported. "This is how they got them out. And if Smith took Timothy along when he left," he added grimly, "that means he's had an hour and a half's time to hide the boy somewhere else."

He banged the door shut then and tore along the hall toward the next flight, moving as swiftly as he dared.

Sandy, behind him, was muttering, "We never should have come snooping around this place. Then Timothy would still be here. And—"

"And what?" Ken interrupted him harshly. "If they're going to return him to his family after they've collected the money, they'll do that in any case. If they're not, he's probably no worse off wherever he is than if we hadn't come along and upset the plans. And at least we know something now that may help the police track them down."

But the harshness in his voice covered a desperate conviction that

if Timothy was now in worse danger than before, Ken himself was solely responsible. Inwardly he accused himself of having done just what his father had warned him against-of having increased the peril of Timothy's situation. And now it might be too late to repair the damage.

As he and Sandy plunged out through the front entrance of the house they looked swiftly in both directions. No traffic of any kind was in sight. They paused only long enough to read the faded number above the house door, and then, side by side, set off on a run for the Enterprise Pharmacy around the corner.

They were racing the last twenty yards toward its dingy front when the lights behind its windows went out. Sandy increased his speed and grabbed the startled clerk just as the man stepped through the door and turned to lock it.

"Got to use your phone!" Sandy gasped. "Emergency!"

"But we're closed! You can't!" The thin clerk they had talked to earlier that day was shorter than Sandy, and he looked up at the redhead now with terror in his eyes, as if he believed Sandy's actual intent was robbery.

"Go ahead, Ken," Sandy said over the man's shoulder.

Ken brushed past them as Sandy added to the clerk, "It's all right, really. We've just got to use your phone. Police business." And then Ken was inside the booth and dialing the number of the Global office.

A moment later his father was saying, "Ken! Thank heaven! Are you all right?"

"Fine," Ken assured him briefly. "Listen, Dad. We found him-held by two men in an old house on Galan Street."

"Galan?" Holt's voice was as tense as Ken's.

"But they've taken him away from there-I think because we turned up-and we don't know where he is now. But we do know the payoff was scheduled for seven o'clock. A third man, who calls himself John Smith, was to pick up the money-we don't know where-and then meet the other two somewhere in Connecticut at ten. Apparently Smith is in a green convertible. Probably Timothy and the governess were with him-about an hour and a half ago. Got all that? The rest we can fill in when we see you. We'll grab a cab and get right up there."

"Never mind the cab," his father told him. "Where are you calling from?"

"Enterprise Pharmacy, Caslon Street."

"There'll be a squad car there in a couple of minutes. Stay where you are."

Holt didn't waste words. The phone clicked in Ken's ear.

For a moment Ken slumped against the wall of the booth. His father hadn't blamed him for what had happened, but perhaps that

was only because Richard Holt thought it would cost valuable time. The blame would undoubtedly come later. And, Ken thought, he would deserve it. But accepting the blame would not help Timothy.

Ken blinked his eyes to shut out a sudden picture of young Timothy looking up at Sandy and himself on the observation deck of the airport terminal the day before, and the delighted and trusting smile that had spread over the boy's face.

Then he took a deep breath, straightened up from the wall, and came out into the crowded dusty aisle of the little drugstore.

The clerk had apparently forgotten both his alarm and his previous intention of closing the shop immediately. Now he was seated on a stool at the soda counter, plying Sandy with eager questions.

"But are the police after that man you were looking for earlier-the one I told you about?" he asked.

"Sorry," Sandy said firmly. "We're not allowed to talk about the case."

"But who are you two, anyway? You're certainly not cops, are you? You're too young. If I'd thought when I answered all your questions this afternoon that you'd--"

Ken took pity on Sandy's harassed look. "You were a great help," he assured the clerk. "And you'll probably see your name mentioned in the papers one of these days, as having assisted immeasurably in an important police case."

"But *what* case?" the man persisted.

A siren slashed the quiet of Caslon Street and an instant later a squad car braked to a fast stop in front of the drugstore.

"That's for us," Ken said. "Come on, Sandy. Thanks very much," he told the clerk, and then he and Sandy hurried toward the door.

A uniformed officer was already out of the car and approaching the pharmacy. "Holt and Allen?" he inquired. When the boys nodded, he said, "O.K. Get in. Feed it to her, Bob," he added to his driver. "They want quick delivery."

The boys were thrown hard against the back of the cramped rear seat as the car lurched forward. The traffic light ahead was red, but the car's siren cut loose with an ear-splitting scream and the vehicle shot west across the intersection at a rapidly increasing speed. Two blocks later, its siren again in full voice, it swung northward on Broadway, shifted to Fifth Avenue at Twenty-third and continued north. Nine minutes after the boys stepped into the car they were entering the Global News Building.

Richard Holt's first words, when the boys entered the anteroom of Granger's office a few minutes later, were "Let me look at you. Sure you're both all right?"

"Sure," Ken told him, wishing fervently that he could say the same

thing about Timothy Crandall at that moment.

And then, before he had the opportunity to give his father any details, Granger appeared in the door of his office with two other men, both in ordinary business suits. One of them Ken and Sandy both recognized as Richard Holt's friend, Captain Hotchner of the State Police. The stocky man beside him Hotchner quickly identified as Joe Saldon, of the New York City Police Department, and to Saldon he said, "These are the two news hounds who apparently have broken the Crandall kidnapping wide open. Now maybe we can really get to work on the case."

Sandy's look betrayed his amazement. "How'd you get here so fast?"

"We've been sort of nibbling at the edges ever since last night," Hotchner answered. "We couldn't do anything openly in the face of Walsh's denials that there was a kidnapping. But we didn't have to swallow everything he said, either. I was in City Police headquarters, talking to Joe here, when your father called half an hour ago to tell us he was getting a little worried about you two. So when he called us ten minutes ago to report on your call to him we came right up here." He turned to Holt. "I called the Federal men as soon as you mentioned the chance of the case moving over into Connecticut, and--"

"Look," Ken cut in, unable any longer to hide what was uppermost in his mind, "if they moved Timothy from that Galan Street house because we turned up there, and if Timothy is in more danger now than--"

Hotchner interrupted him with a steady hand on his shoulder. "Kidnapping is a particularly vicious crime. Kidnappers invariably promise to guard the safety of their victims, and to return them to their families," he said quietly. "But they don't keep those promises, often as not. You've brought us the good news that Timothy was apparently still all right this afternoon. We hope you've brought us information that we can use to track down his captors pretty quickly and get him back safe. So whatever happened at the Galan Street house--since you two have emerged from it safely yourselves--should be all to the good. Not that I recommend that sort of risk to anybody not on a police force," he added with a faint smile.

"You didn't have to stick your necks in a noose just to convince us you were right about the kidnapping!" Granger growled. "How'd those thugs ever let you get away?"

"They didn't know we saw what they looked like," Sandy answered. "They were wearing masks when they caught us--the first two were, that is. And they didn't know we'd overheard them."

"Wait a minute," Hotchner said. "Take the whole thing from the beginning. But first give us the number of that Galan Street house."

“Thirty-eight,” Ken told him. “And we overheard a statement that the man who calls himself Smith had arranged to have the use of the building for a month.”

“Right,” Saldon said quickly. “We’ll get working on that right now.” He reached for a phone.

“Sit down,” Granger said. “I see my office has become an outpost of the police department, so make yourselves at home.”

While they took chairs around the table, Saldon was asking over the phone for a run-down on the Galan Street house-the name of its owner, the name of the man to whom he had recently rented it, and any information the local precinct might have about the building and the men who had apparently occupied it for at least the past twenty-four hours.

“I need speed,” he concluded, and then hung up and swung around to face the others at the table. “All right. I’m ready for the rest of it.”

“We’ve already alerted the Coast Guard to be prepared to search for a boat crossing Long Island Sound tonight,” Hotchner told the boys. “And now, if you’ll give us everything else you learned this afternoon, we’ll see what we can do with the information.”

“Hasn’t Walsh admitted the kidnapping yet?” Sandy insisted on asking first. “Even now-since the ransom money has already been paid over?”

Hotchner shook his head. “We talked to him again after Dick Holt got your call, but he still insists the boy is safe at home. And he’s apparently determined to go on saying that until the boy is actually returned.”

“Or until he finds out the youngster isn’t ever going to-” Saldon broke off abruptly. “Let’s hear what you’ve got to tell us.” He looked from Ken to Sandy and back again.

“You take it, Ken,” Sandy muttered.

Ken knew, even without Saldon’s last choked-off remark, that everybody in the room was as desperately concerned for Timothy’s safety as he was himself. But Hotchner’s speech about the importance of everything Sandy and he had learned prevented him from wasting time on further attempts at self-blame. As concisely and accurately as he could he began to outline the events of the afternoon.

Within three minutes by the big clock on Granger’s wall he had sketched in the reason why he and Sandy had first visited the Enterprise Pharmacy, the data they had picked up there about the red-haired man with the crooked nose, their search of the neighborhood, the unexpected sight of the green convertible in the vacant lot, the signal from the attic window, and the events that followed until they were once more back in the drugstore calling Richard Holt. All four men listened intently, and each took notes as he talked.

Hotchner spoke first when Ken had finished. "They made no mention of where the ransom pickup was to take place, or as to where in Connecticut the three would be meeting at ten o'clock?"

Ken and Sandy both shook their heads.

"But there can't be many boats in the water at this time of the year, can there?" Ken asked. "Wouldn't a boat yard remember launching or selling a boat recently?"

"Sorry," Hotchner said. "Thought I'd told you that we started a check of Long Island boat yards at the same time we alerted the Coast Guard. It's a big job, but we ought to start getting reports on it pretty soon." He shifted to a new subject. "That green convertible-any idea what make and model it was?"

Sandy shut his eyes a moment, to concentrate on the car as he had seen it clearly at the airport the day before. "Oldsmobile, I think," he said finally. "And a couple of years old, I'd say."

Hotchner nodded. "Not a very easy car to trace, but at least it's better than knowing nothing at all about it." This time it was he who picked up the phone and issued orders that would be transmitted to his own police force and the Long Island State Police, to be on the lookout for that kind of a car. "I just don't mean from now on," he concluded. "If any such car has been spotted anywhere during the past hour and a half, I want word on that too. And watch for abandoned cars."

Next, he got from Ken and Sandy the most detailed descriptions they could give him of all three men. And with this material, he and Saldon immediately set in motion the complicated machinery that might possibly unearth a report of Andy and Jerry having been seen at a New York bus or train station, en route to Connecticut, or a report on Smith having been seen anywhere at all in the vicinity of Crag's End.

"Too bad the prints and pictures of those two aren't on file," Saldon muttered. "Maybe they are, of course-we'll ask you boys to go through the rogues' gallery, anyway, when things get rolling. But if the men themselves said they weren't-at a time when they didn't know they were being overheard-they were probably telling the truth. Of course, if this Smith fellow was able to make himself up skillfully enough to pass as the Crandall chauffeur, he undoubtedly has a dozen other disguises and is going to be particularly difficult to trace."

"Nothing about this case is easy," Hotchner said grimly. "The gang must have had some inside help to complicate matters too, but we'll get to that after we have the boy. At least now we've got some leads to follow. The trouble is that I can't think of anything else we can do, until some of our phone calls begin to produce results."

For a moment there was silence around the table. Richard Holt

broke it.

“Waiting is always the toughest part of a police job,” he said quietly. “But maybe we can at least get organized on exactly what’s going to happen when we can go into action. If you hear of a boat yard that has sold or launched a boat recently, for example, what will be the next step? To search the whole surrounding area?”

Saldon answered his question. “I’ve done a good deal of sailing and running around Long Island coastal waters,” he said, “so I’ve got some ideas on that subject. If Smith is planning to cross the Sound tonight, I can’t believe he’d pick up his boat at the yard at the last minute. Leaving a boat yard after dark, in this weather, would automatically arouse the yard owner’s curiosity. So I think Smith probably took possession of the boat some days ago, and sailed it away, then and there, to a secluded anchorage that he could leave tonight without anybody being the wiser.”

“‘A secluded anchorage?’” Holt repeated. “Are there many such places on Long Island? After all, it’s a pretty populated area.”

Ken’s fists clenched tightly in his pockets. Conversation about boat anchorages seemed strangely irrelevant at the moment. He wanted to leap up and shout that something be done, to deny Hotchner’s statement that there was nothing they could do until some of the phone calls the police had made produced results. But he knew that Hotchner was right. And his father was right too, Ken thought grimly, when he said that waiting was the toughest part of any police job. Determinedly, Ken forced himself to listen to the strained, tense conversation of the older men.

“It would probably be a harbor-an inlet, a cove, something of the sort-that’s busy during the summer but that is completely deserted now because all the surrounding houses are vacation cottages,” Saldon was saying. “There are a good many places of that kind.”

“There are a good many boat yards too,” Granger growled unexpectedly. “There must be hundreds on the Island. How long is it going to take to check them all?”

“There are hundreds,” Hotchner admitted. “But we’ve got the local police on the job and that ought to speed things up.”

The ringing of the phone put a sharp period to his sentence. Granger snatched it up. A moment later he handed it to Saldon.

The detective listened intently, scribbled notes, said “Thanks, Conway,” and hung up. “Report on the Galan Street house,” he told the circle of intent faces staring into his. “And it doesn’t help at all. Owner is a man named Rowland Custer, a well-known property holder in that neighborhood with nothing known against him. He says he rented it for a month to a man who gave his name as John Grey. Custer never saw him. The deal was consummated by phone and Grey

paid cash in advance, delivered by messenger. He said he wanted to store some furniture and didn't mind the poor condition of the house, which incidentally is scheduled for demolition six weeks from now. So, under the circumstances, Custer was glad enough to pick up the extra rent money -didn't ask a lot of questions and didn't demand references. And that's that."

"Which, as you say, doesn't help at all," Hotchner muttered unhappily.

Again silence clamped down over the room. Every eye was riveted on the phone. Every ear was waiting for the ring that might-that must, Ken told himself-bring them the lead they needed.

When the phone finally did ring, Hotchner snatched it up even before Granger's hand had touched it.

"Yes, speaking." The tall, rangy body of the State Police officer tensed in his chair as he listened. "Where?" he barked. And then, "When was that? ... Right. Hold it." He turned to the others long enough to say, "The Gillespie Shipyard at Laurel Cove sold and launched a boat three days ago."

The atmosphere in the room suddenly became electric. While Hotchner directed further low-voiced questions into the phone, Saldon produced out of his pocket a map of Long Island which he flicked open on the table with a single movement. An instant later he had placed his finger on Laurel Cove and turned the map so that Hotchner could see the location. Then he ran his finger out from that spot, first in one direction and then in the other, to indicate the outer boundaries of the area he believed ought to be subjected to intensive search.

Hotchner, nodding, spoke Saldon's recommendations to the officer at the other end of the line. "Have your men cover the whole area on either side-from Huntington Bay to Hempstead Harbor. ... I know it's a lot of territory, but we've got no way of narrowing it down right now... . Bring in anyone who has seen a boat of that description, either in motion or at anchor. The most likely possibility is that it's been tied up for a couple of days in some summer-cottage section normally deserted at this time of year. And look for that green convertible at the same time... . Yes, I'll call the Coast Guard from here."

He hung up and then dialed again immediately. While he did so, he said to the others, "The buyer of the boat sounds like Smith all right-gray curly hair, round face." And then he was speaking into the phone, transmitting to a Coast Guard officer the information about the Laurel Cove boat-yard lead. "I know it's a lot of water to watch, but I can't do any better now... . Yes, my men are checking the coast along there."

While he had been speaking, Saldon-and Sandy, to whom maps were as legible as a printed page-had been tracing the possible route of a boat leaving the general vicinity of Laurel Cove for the Connecticut shore. Saldon reported their conclusions the moment Hotchner was free to listen.

"Considering the tide," he said, "and the fact that the shortest possible route would be the best in weather like this, I'd say that boat might strike Connecticut somewhere west of Norwalk."

Hotchner nodded. "Right. I'll ask the Connecticut State Police to concentrate their search for Andy and Jerry in that area." And he made one more phone call before he was free to conclude his report to the others.

"Smith-if that's who it was," he said, "visited that Laurel Cove yard for the first time about three weeks ago. He said he was looking for a boat to take south along the inland waterway. Tentatively picked out the *Heron*-a thirty-foot motorboat with a dinghy-and said he'd phone the yard owner when he'd made up his mind. He concluded the deal a week ago by phone, and asked to have the *Heron* launched and put in running order. Three days ago he paid for her-with cash-and sailed her out of the yard anchorage himself the same day."

"Wasn't the boat-yard owner suspicious," Granger demanded, "of a man who said he was going south in a thirty-foot boat in this weather?"

"My men asked him that." Hotchner smiled briefly and without humor. "Said he'd been in the business too long to be surprised at anything boat owners do."

Ken looked at the clock. Its hour hand pointed to eight. "If the ransom money was picked up at seven, and the *Heron* was anchored fairly close by, he could already be well out in the Sound by now."

"And if Walsh would just break down and tell us where that pickup was made," Granger growled, "you'd have a better chance of nabbing him before he gets to the other side and goes into hiding! Do you think he's got the boy with him?" he added. "Or do you-?"

The shrilling of the phone drowned out his words and Hotchner had the instrument clamped against his ear a split second later. "Hotchner here," he said. Then he was half on his feet, eyes wide. "Where? ... Get to it fast, man! Fast!" he demanded hoarsely. "The boy may be aboard!"

Slowly he sank back into his chair, automatically returning the phone to its cradle. "Coast Guard boat, calling ship to shore. They just sighted a burning boat about three miles northeast of Bayville," he told them.

"Burning!" Ken gasped.

For a long moment none of the others spoke. It was Saldon who

first shook off the horrified paralysis that seemed to grip them all to ask, "How far away is the nearest Coast Guard vessel?"

"Half a mile." Hotchner's voice was almost inaudible.

"Then it can reach the *Heron* in three or four minutes," Saldon said. "That may be time enough to—"

"But maybe it's not the *Heron* that's afire!" Granger broke in. "We don't *know* that there's not another boat out on the Sound tonight."

But they did know it, all of them. Even Granger's expression said he knew too that the boat burning helplessly three miles from shore was beyond any doubt the one recently purchased by the man who called himself John Smith.

Outside of Granger's office, the teletype machines were rattling as usual. Inside the room, six men sat in complete silence and six pairs of eyes watched the second hand creep around the face of the clock.

It was making its third painfully slow revolution when the phone rang.

"Hotchner here." Then, as he listened, the State Police officer's lined face, already pale with strain, went gray. But he didn't speak again until he said, "O.K. Keep looking," and dropped the phone.

He was staring unseeingly into space as he reported. "They got close enough to see that the burning boat matched the general description of the *Heron*. But she blew up while they were still a thousand feet away. They're searching for survivors."

CHAPTER XII

PRINTS IN THE SAND

For the second time in less than an hour Ken had a vivid recollection of Timothy's smiling face turned trustingly up toward Sandy and himself as the boy stepped off the plane the day before. Less than thirty hours had passed since that moment, but every one of them must have been filled with terror for a small boy.

Instead of being driven home to the welcome of an affectionate uncle, Timothy had found himself the prisoner of a man who had masqueraded as the Crandall chauffeur. He had endured what must have been an agonizingly long night in the attic room of the Galan Street house, followed by an even longer and more frightening day-until that moment when he had hopefully tossed the tiny grinning tiger to the two he had once described as "famous detektives." But that gesture had not resulted, as he must have felt certain it would, in immediate rescue. It had brought on a second and doubly alarming trip by car to some frozen waste of sand and water where he and his governess had been bundled aboard a small boat in the darkness of a winter night. And then, not long after the boat had left her moorings for the vast waters of the icy Sound, there had been the searing skyrocketing flames that transformed her into a floating torch, and the violent explosion that splintered her timbers and drove her beneath the waves. Could Timothy possibly have survived the fire and the blast that destroyed the *Heron*? Could he swim-could he even keep himself afloat-if he was still alive when the boat went down? Would Smith attempt to rescue the boy he had kidnaped if he himself had escaped death, or would he-?

But suddenly the tragic drama that had been playing itself out before Ken's blank unseeing eyes shriveled into unbelievability. Suddenly Ken was convinced that at some vital point his imagination had departed completely from the truth.

"Timothy *wasn't* on the boat!" Ken didn't even realize he had shouted the words aloud until the sound of his own voice snapped him back into reality.

The others around the table in Granger's office were staring at him.

"He couldn't have been! It doesn't make sense!" Ken was on his feet in the urgency of explaining the overpowering conviction that had seized him. "Smith had his money. Why would he take Timothy and the governess with him while he made his getaway?"

"Because he needed a hostage," Granger said flatly.

"But traveling around with a boy and a woman would be more

trouble than it could be worth,” Ken argued. “No-I think he left them somewhere-somewhere near the *Heron’s* anchorage, probably. And if I’m right, we ought to be out looking for them, not sitting around here-“

“Let me have that tide table again.” Saldon’s voice, as quiet now as it had been all evening, told Ken that the New York police officer had at least tentatively accepted his reasoning. And even as he made the request Saldon was once more studying his map. First he penciled a cross at the spot three miles northeast of Bayville, where the boat had gone down. Then, with a muttered “Thanks” to Granger, who handed him a tide table torn from that day’s issue of a city daily, he studied both it and the map again. As the others watched, he penciled circles in several coast-line indentations-small bays, mouths of inlets, and other possible anchorages-within several miles of the catastrophe-denoting cross.

“O.K.,” he said finally. “The tide’s setting eastward. Nobody would try to buck it. So, if we assume that Smith was traveling with it when he headed across the Sound, and if he took off about seven-thirty, I think we can now make a pretty good guess that he left from one of these places.” His pencil moved from one circle to the next. “And I think these two are the most likely.”

Hotchner, his face a little less gray than it had been, bent over the map. “Ice Creek and Porpoise Bay, eh? They both have enough water to have been used as an anchorage for a thirty-foot boat?”

“At high tide,” Saldon told him. “Some thirty-footers only draw two feet of water.”

“But what makes you think that the boy would be left in the same neighborhood where Smith kept his boat?” Granger asked.

Ken was ready with an answer. “Because that would be the only practical thing to do. When Smith decided to get them out of the Galan Street house-where he’d apparently planned to leave them, until Sandy and I turned up there-he probably didn’t have an emergency hide-out ready. He hadn’t known he was going to need one. So I think he just took Timothy and the governess along with him when he went, then left them tied up in the car when he sailed off.”

Hotchner had already picked up the phone and was dialing it. “Hotchner calling,” he said a moment later. “I want another search made of that coastal area, concentrating this time between Muskrat Point and Porpoise Head, with special attention to Ice Creek and Porpoise Bay. On the chance that the boy may not have been on that boat-that he may have been left in the car instead, I want all roads near possible boat anchorages in that area checked for the green Olds convertible. I *know* it’s putting a lot of eggs in one basket, but it’s worth a try... . Sign up some deputies if you can, and I’ll be out there

myself as soon as I can make it. Convertibles aren't the most comfortable places in the world in weather like this, and if that boy's in one of them we want to get to him as quickly as we can."

The moment he hung up he said grimly, "And now I'm going to try Walsh once more. This time, I'll *make* him tell me where the ransom money was left. Smith would probably have arranged to pick it up at some place fairly near his boat anchorage. And if we know where that place is, we'll have a double check on the area to be searched."

He was dialing before he finished the last sentence. "This is Captain Hotchner, State Police," he said into the phone now. "I want to speak to Mr. Walsh... . He can't be disturbed?" The bite in Hotchner's voice deepened. "Well, tell him that if he doesn't come to the phone I'll come out there to the Crandall estate to speak to him... . Yes, I'll wait."

The five others in Granger's office waited with him.

In thirty seconds Hotchner was saying, "Mr. Walsh? Now listen to me, please. I'm going to tell you exactly what we know, and then I'm going to ask you a question. I won't repeat the facts I reported to you earlier-about the boy and his governess being held in New York. He was removed from there, presumably by the man to whom you paid a sum of money at seven o'clock. Since that hour that man has set out across Long Island Sound in a small boat-and that boat has exploded and sunk. The boy may have been with him... . Please! Just listen to me. There is a chance that the boy is still alive-that he was left on shore. We're instituting a search for him right now. But even if he is alive at this moment he may not live long exposed to the elements on a night like this. There's no time to waste. And nobody but yourself can narrow our search area down to a point where we can reasonably expect to cover it before dawn. It's up to you! Are you going to tell me where the ransom pickup was made, or are you going to have it on your conscience for the rest of your life if something happens to those two because you refused to co-operate?"

The silence in Granger's room was so complete, when Hotchner concluded his question, that Walsh's heavy uneven breathing was audible over the receiver.

"I-I-" The painfulness of the lawyer's indecision was as obvious as if he had been standing before them.

And then Walsh began to talk. The State Police officer's brows furrowed as he listened. And when the voice at the other end of the wire stopped, Hotchner wasted no time in polite phrases. "Right. We'll keep you informed," he said, and hung up.

His pencil was already jabbing at Saldon's map as he set the phone down. "They followed the kidnapper's telephoned directions explicitly. Brooks left a package containing the ransom money at the

Gold-ring mailbox, on Dune Lane, right here, at six-forty-five.” He was pointing to a road that ran toward the Sound, some miles west of Crag’s End—a road that almost perfectly bisected the area they had already decided to search. “So that’s that. Let’s go.”

The next few minutes were a flurry of questions and answers. Ken and Sandy, determined to join the hunt, received Hotchner’s permission to accompany him to the point where he was meeting the men already centered on the coastal area marked on the map. Holt was joining the party too. Granger, unable to leave his desk, was phoning downstairs to have a Global car brought up from the garage for the boys’ use. And Saldon, whose jurisdiction did not extend beyond the city limits, was doing his best for the four about to leave the office by arranging for a squad car to give them an escort to the New York City boundary line on Grand Central Boulevard.

“Wish I were going along,” Saldon said quietly, as he concluded his phone call.

And Granger, reaching into a desk drawer and pulling out a handful of chocolate bars, thrust them at Sandy with a gruff, “Here! But don’t eat them all. Save some for the boy in case you—”

Then Ken and Sandy, Hotchner, and Richard Holt were downstairs in front of the Global News Building. The latter two stepped into a police car parked at the curb, and Ken and Sandy found a garage attendant waiting with the car Granger had ordered for them. A squad car pulled up in the same instant, stopped beside Hotchner’s opened window for a moment, and then drew on ahead to clear a way with its siren. Hotchner waved his arm at the boys before he closed his window against the bitter cold, and slid into the lane that opened up before him. Sandy released his own brake and followed.

The next fifteen minutes, which brought the three-car cavalcade to the New York City limits, was almost as swift a trip as Ken and Sandy had experienced earlier that evening. And at that point a parkway police cruiser took over the squad car’s role and led the way forward at a speed which ignored the mileage-limit signs flashing by at regular intervals along the shoulder.

Ken, bracing his feet to steady himself, explored the glove compartment and found two powerful flashlights. The gesture reminded him of the many times he had looked in the compartment of their own convertible, for the food supplies Sandy always providently carried there, and that reminded him of Granger’s parting gifts. Glancing at Sandy’s set face, bent over the wheel, he said, “What happened to the chocolate bars? You look as if you could stand one. I could myself.

“The what? Oh—in my pocket.”

The fact that Sandy had forgotten them, too, told Ken more clearly

than anything else that the redhead had been suffering as acutely as he had himself over the fate of young Timothy Crandall. Silently Ken reached into Sandy's jacket pocket, pulled out two of the bars, and fed one to Sandy as he drove.

Thirteen miles past the New York City line, the police car up ahead blinked its lights at its escort, pulled ahead of it, and swung off the parkway. Sandy followed Hotchner, whose red roof light had flashed on as he took the lead. A few minutes later they were traveling down a narrow road that seemed to twist and turn without reason as it threaded its way through the residential neighborhoods crowding the area between the parkway and the Sound.

Travel was slower here, even with the glowing police signal to warn other cars out of their way. Sandy kept his eyes glued to the taillights ahead, jamming on his brakes when Hotchner's stop lights flared into life, stamping hard on the accelerator again when the powerful police car zoomed down a rare straight stretch. There was no siren now to split the darkness. There was only the muted roar of the engine as it drove the car forward into the tunnel of light formed by the twin beams aimed ahead.

Suddenly Hotchner's stop lights blinked on and off in warning. Sandy pumped the brake and slid to a stop directly behind the State Police car as it pulled to the side of the road. A uniformed state trooper materialized out of the shadows of a high hedge, to salute briefly as he bent down to speak to Hotchner. Ken and Sandy jumped out of their own car and hurried forward.

Hotchner already had a map spread open over the steering wheel and the trooper was pointing at it with a gloved hand. Quickly he rattled off the placement of the men the captain had ordered before he left New York.

"The south bank of Ice Creek is pretty well covered by men on foot. Two cars are working west from Gull Head Point. Two of our men and the local police are handling Porpoise Bay. And the county sheriff has assigned men to those little bays and inlets south of Porgy Point. We're expecting some more of our own men pretty soon, and the sheriff is rounding up some extra help too. We'll use them as reinforcements and to cover a couple of small beach settlements we've had to ignore so far-like the little one at the head of that sandspit that forms the Sound-side bank of Ice Creek."

"Why can't we take that one?" Sandy asked. "We could get going right away."

The trooper looked at them curiously. Hotchner performed swift introductions. And then the boys were studying the map to learn the quickest route to the destination Hotchner's brisk nod had assigned them to.

“Turn right at the next light, and then left two lights beyond,” the trooper told them. “That puts you on Oak Beach Road, which runs straight down to the Sound. The head of Ice Creek is a couple of hundred feet to your left there-the creek is just a little inlet, really, running in behind that long sandspit. There are no houses at all on the spit, but there are a couple of boarded-up cottages on the other side of the road, spread out along the Sound beach. I don’t think there are more than four or five of them,” he added, “so it shouldn’t take you long to make sure the car isn’t there.”

“Right,” Sandy said, with one last look at the map. “Shall we go on from there to another location, or should we come back here?”

“Back here,” Hotchner answered. “I’m going down past Gull Head Point myself, but Trooper Waski will stay here and reports will all be channeled through him. By the time you get back, he’ll know where we still need reinforcements.”

Ken asked one question before he and Sandy dashed back to their car. Glancing at Hotchner’s short-wave radio, he said, “Any further reports from the Coast Guard?”

Hotchner shook his head. “Nothing. They’re still cruising the area where the *Heron* went down, but-” There was no need for him to say more. It was over an hour since the explosion occurred, and it was highly unlikely that any human being could have survived that long in the frigid waters of the Sound.

Richard Holt spoke for the first time. “The more I think about it, the more I think your deductions are right, Ken. I don’t believe Timothy was ever on the *Heron*. I think we’re going to find him before the night’s over.” From the dusky interior of the car his eyes met Ken’s for a moment. “Keep in touch with Trooper Waski here,” he said. “I’ve got a hunch there’s going to be good news before long.”

Ken managed a faint but grateful grin, and then he and Sandy were back in their car and Sandy was guiding it past the police vehicle and on down the road.

Ken wondered, as they drove the unfamiliar route, how many places to hide a car there were in the area Hotchner’s forces were attempting to cover within a matter of hours. Hundreds? Thousands?

“This is it.” Sandy was letting the car roll to a gentle stop where Oak Beach Road ended abruptly at the edge of the Sound beach. In front of them, beyond the wide ribbon of sand that looked white in the glow of the headlights, the dark restless waters of the Sound stretched, unbroken, to the Connecticut shore some ten miles away. The pounding of jagged wind-broken waves, as they hurled relentlessly against the flat beach, sounded loud in their ears when Sandy flicked off the ignition switch. Then Sandy turned off the lights too. The beach was dulled to dim silver under a heavy moonless sky,

and nothing broke the black expanse of water beyond it except the tiny red flicker of a channel marker, visible momentarily as it rose on a distant swell.

They got out of the car and walked forward, jacket collars turned high, bodies bent against the force of the wind. At the end of only half a dozen steps their feet were already sinking into loose dry sand that slithered underfoot and swirled up around them in gusts that bit stingingly against their faces.

To left and right the beach stretched away into the darkness. Ken's flashlight burrowed a long, narrow tunnel of light toward the left where somewhere, behind high-piled dunes, Ice Creek ran between the mainland and what appeared to be a beach, but was in reality merely an overgrown sand bar. To the right were the beach houses, among which the car might be hidden. Ken was still prodding the night when Sandy's voice shouted against the wind and the roar of the water.

"Look! Something white!"

Sandy's flash was aimed at a spot perhaps a thousand feet along the beach to the left, illuminating a bright circle of sand and water where the two met at a constantly shifting boundary. At the center of that circle, rocking forward with each shoreward driving wave and backward with each ebb, rode a shapeless flash of white.

Sandy started toward it, running awkwardly through the deep slippery sand. Ken ran behind him.

They were almost upon it before the constantly moving object could be identified.

"It's a rowboat!" Ken gasped, sprinting the last few feet over the damp stretch of sand smoothed by the last high tide.

"An empty dinghy!" Sandy echoed. He had approached so close that a wave which shattered itself over the boat dashed icy foam in his face.

"Maybe it's from the *Heron*!" Ken grabbed Sandy's arm and shouted in his ear. "Maybe Smith got ashore in it!"

Sandy shook his head. "Impossible. The tide and the wind are both east. A dinghy cast off up the coast near Bayville would never have got back here." Automatically he took a few steps toward the little boat, in the wake of an ebbing wave. But the next surge thrust itself toward him before he could lay hands on the dinghy, and he retreated up the beach again, leaving the craft to bounce forward and back just out of reach.

When he turned around, Ken had left his side to start back along the beach, the way they had come, but this time following the path of damp sand close to the water and flashing his light on the ground before him.

"What're you doing?" Sandy demanded.

"Looking for footprints," Ken told him, without glancing up. "If somebody did come ashore in that dinghy tonight—"

"But that's not what we're here for!" Sandy protested. "That dinghy's probably been drifting around for days, anyway."

"Look!" Ken's light was illuminating several definite prints in the sand a few feet ahead of them—prints left by a lone walker. They originated at the

There were several definite prints in the sand water line, slanted inland for a short distance, and then moved forward in the same direction the boys were walking, parallel to the line of pounding surf.

Sandy's light joined Ken's with a swift jerk. "But—" he began, when Ken interrupted him.

"You say Smith couldn't have got back here from the spot where the boat burned," Ken said quickly, leaning close to Sandy to make himself heard. "But maybe he wasn't on the *Heron* then! Maybe nobody was on it!"

"Huh?" Automatically Sandy lifted his light to Ken's face, as if suspecting a joke behind the surprising words.

But Ken's expression was dead serious. Impatiently he pushed the light away. "Suppose Smith never intended to go to Connecticut? Suppose he was planning to double-cross Andy and Jerry and never meant to meet them at all? If he could convince them he was dead, he'd be able to keep all the money for himself. Don't you see? He could have started out in the *Heron*, just as we thought, set some kind of a clock mechanism that would start a fire aboard her at a given time, lashed her wheel on a course for Connecticut, and then transferred to the dinghy and rowed ashore. Andy and Jerry would read about the boat afire on the Sound in tomorrow's paper and give him up for dead. And even if the police had got on Smith's trail, they'd give him up too."

Sandy's expression had changed, while Ken talked, from incredulity to dawning belief. Now he grabbed Ken's arm and said, "Which is exactly what we all did, of course!" He broke off, and his eyes followed the beam of light as it flashed far ahead, illuminating the row of footprints that would remain sharp in the damp sand until the next high tide washed them away. Then he swung around to face Ken again. "But if you're right," he exclaimed, "and Smith landed back here to make a getaway, he must have taken the car with him. So where is Timothy?"

Ken aimed his flash in answer, aimed it so that the thin pencil of brilliance picked up the white trim on the four lonely summer cottages that stood a thousand feet away on the edge of the beach. "What better hiding place than one of those houses?" he asked quietly.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAN OF MANY FACES

Cold salt spray froze on their cheeks and the icy wind bit through their heavy clothes as they followed the footprints that marched ahead of them like a row of fat exclamation points engraved in the wet sand. A vicious gust whipped stinging spray into their eyes, blurring their vision and almost blowing them over.

"Hold it!" Ken turned his back to the wind to catch his breath and rub his eyes with hands almost numb, in spite of warm gloves he was wearing.

Sandy aimed his light shoreward until it picked up the glitter of chrome on their car. "Smith probably parked his car where we parked ours," he said, during a momentary break between gusts. "The footsteps should begin to head that way pretty soon.

But the prints didn't turn inland toward the road. They continued forward in a line parallel with the water. The boys paused hesitantly at this seeming error in their deduction.

Ken moved his head close to Sandy's. "Maybe he was afraid to leave his car parked in the open. Maybe he hid it near the cottages."

"Come on!"

Interminable minutes seemed to drag by before they were abreast of the first of the four cottages. Sandy's light, aimed ten feet ahead, suddenly picked up unmarked sand. He moved the flashlight around in a small circle. "Look!" The prints angled inland and vanished when they reached the powdery sand of the dry portion of the beach.

Ken turned to look at Sandy and the redhead nodded. The half-frozen mask of his face reflected Ken's own sensation of sudden soaring hope. They began to run. Feet numb from cold slithered sideways on the treacherous footing of dry sand. There were no footprints now to guide them, but there was no doubt as to where Smith had been heading.

The bungalows were only some three hundred feet back from the water, but to the boys the distance seemed ten times that far. And the last fifty feet, before they reached the small cleared strip that served the four closely spaced houses as a single long yard overlooking the Sound, was a tangle of harsh beach grass, prickly burrs, and thorn-studded wild roses. The matted grass tore at their feet and tripped them. The burrs clung to their clothes and, like the brittle rose thorns, penetrated through heavy clothing to lacerate skin already painful with cold.

But at last only a few yards of bare sand separated them from the

first house in the row. Like the others, dimly visible farther to their left, it was of weathered shingles and sprawled close to the ground for protection against the winds that buffeted it year in and year out.

Ken stared at its front windows, covered for the winter with heavy wooden shutters, and at the sturdy storm door fitted over the entrance. How would they discover whether Timothy was hidden in the house, he wondered, unless they actually broke into the building? Smith would scarcely have left a light for his captives—a light that might show some gleam through an unnoticed crack. Directing his flash on the ground in front of his feet, Ken pulled at Sandy's arm to lead him around the house, in the hope of finding a means of entrance easier than any on the Sound side—the front of the building.

There were only two windows on the entire side wall of the house and both were strongly shuttered.

Ken turned the rear corner and stopped dead, flinging out an arm to keep Sandy from moving past him.

Just ahead of them rose a low clump of evergreens, but that was not what had made Ken pause. He had been brought to a halt by the thin yellow streak of light shining through a crack between shutter and frame, at the base of a window between the corner and a porch in the middle of the rear wall.

Sandy had seen it too. Even over the roar of the waves and the steady noise of the wind, Ken could hear his swift intake of breath.

For the first time it occurred to Ken that the deductions he had drawn from the dinghy and the footprints had omitted one very real possibility: that Smith had not only come to this cottage after he rowed to shore, but had remained there.

Swiftly, and in the same instant, the two boys doused their lights. Ken could feel the flesh creep on the back of his neck at the thought that he and Sandy had approached this place so incautiously, powerful flashlights beamed ahead of them. If Smith was inside this house, and had been watching them as they drew near—

Ken clenched his chattering teeth and told himself firmly that the glowing crack, so visible to them, would have been useless as a peephole from inside the house.

Slowly, and very cautiously, the boys approached the window, detouring between the clump of evergreens and a stone-bordered driveway Ken's flash had illuminated earlier—a driveway that ran straight past the back of the house toward Oak Beach Road. Ken steadied himself against the wall when he reached it. The crack was just at the level of his eyes. Beside him, he felt Sandy bending down slightly to get in line with it.

The narrowness of the aperture gave them at first only an uninformative glimpse of what appeared to be a kitchen, furnished

with the gaily painted furniture common to many summer homes. Ken could see the legs of a table, several chairs, and part of a sink and a stove. Almost opposite the window a door to a hall stood open.

But by bending lower, to bring another level of the room into view, Ken saw the top of the table and the swivel-headed flashlight standing erect on it. The light's head, angled downward, illuminated a portable camping stove. There was a tin basin on the stove and the water in it was sending up steam that formed eerie shapes as it drifted out of the sharp circle of light toward the ceiling.

Suddenly, less than six inches away from Ken's peering eyes, a solid shape rose up on the other side of the glass, blocking off the light. Ken instinctively reared back. But the sliver of light reappeared almost immediately and Ken leaned forward again. Now there was a man-a man with curly white hair and a broad-cheekboned, dark-complexioned face-standing over the table.

Sandy was clutching Ken's arm in a paralyzing grip. Neither of them so much as whispered the word, but it hung in the air between them: Smith.

The man held a round white jar in one hand and a towel in the other-items that he had apparently been collecting from some bag or other container just beneath the window. Ken shuddered briefly. Smith had been a scant few inches away from them as they approached the house. And then he forgot even to shudder as he watched the man inside the room.

All Smith's movements had the quick economy that suggests long practice. And he was smiling slightly, his dark eyes glancing occasionally into a mirror half-hidden behind the little stove, as he methodically removed a heavy dark sweater, turned the collar of his shirt under so that it lay flat around the base of his neck, and rolled his sleeves up far above the elbow.

Ken started. The dark color of Smith's forearms ended abruptly just below the rolled-up sleeves.

The man was not preparing to put on a disguise, Ken realized. He was getting ready to remove one. The pressure of Sandy's fingers on Ken's arm told him that the redhead had realized that too. In another moment they both knew that the "Smith" who had issued orders to Andy and Jerry was in reality a man those two hirelings would never recognize in the future.

Swiftly Smith hooked a finger first into his right cheek and then into his left, and flicked away the small cotton swabs he had removed. The resulting change in his appearance was remarkable. Now his cheeks were round no longer. Now his face was fairly thin-so thin that it could easily have been made up to resemble the face of the Crandall chauffeur, Pat Malloy.

Then Smith lifted both hands to his face, covering first his right eye for a moment and then his left. When his face was visible again his dark eyes had become light.

Unconsciously Ken shook his head in amazement at a thoroughness which included changing even eye color by the use of tinted contact lenses. No wonder Andy had been impressed by the man's make-up artistry, he thought.

And now a light-eyed Smith was spreading cream from the white jar on his face and neck, his hands and arms. He rubbed it away with the towel which he dipped first into the basin of steaming water. Then he repeated that process, more carefully this time, inspecting himself in the mirror, craning his head this way and that, until every trace of his former dark complexion was removed.

His transformation to a thin-faced blond man, bearing no resemblance whatsoever to the man Ken and Sandy had first seen through the peephole of their prison on Galan Street, was complete when he finally tugged at his hair until it came away in his hand—a curly gray wig that had effectively covered his own flattened yellowish hair. He looked far younger now than he had a few moments before, and as he dabbed at his hairline to remove the last smudges of brownish make-up, he studied himself in the little mirror with a satisfied smile.

Competently, then, he rolled down his sleeves, twisted his collar into place, and buttoned it with one hand while with the other he reached for a handsome sports jacket that had been hanging out of the boys' sight.

Now it was Ken who clutched Sandy's arm. "He's getting ready to leave!" he breathed.

On instinct they backed a few steps away from the window and then stopped, irresolute.

Their prime task, Ken knew, was to rescue Timothy and his governess. And he felt completely certain now that the kidnapped pair were hidden somewhere in the house. But if he and Sandy made no attempt at all to prevent Smith from getting away, and if Smith's escape was successful, Ken knew they would never forgive themselves. Was there a chance of seizing the man the moment he left the house, with no other weapons than surprise and their own strength?

Sandy had apparently already answered that question in his own mind. He leaned close and whispered, "You take the other door—I'll take this."

Ken knew that as usual Sandy was assuming the more dangerous post. Smith would almost certainly emerge from the landward side of the house, probably to head for a car already hidden somewhere. But Ken also knew that it would be futile to argue with his friend, and that

in any case Sandy's greater weight made him the more powerful of the two.

"O.K. But watch yourself," Ken whispered. He half turned to move back around the house the way they had come, but changed his mind and started forward instead, to make certain that no third door opened out of the house on the farther side wall.

As he moved slightly to the right to circle the back porch he kept his hands stretched out before him in the dark, in order to avoid crashing into a tree or some other obstruction. But he had no warning of the low obstacle against which his foot suddenly stumbled, throwing him completely off balance. An instant later he was toppling forward, arms flailing.

Just before his knees and elbows struck hard on the flat concrete step below the porch, his right hand hit something that moved with the impetus of the blow. Ken's fingers, grabbing wildly in the dark, tried to catch it. But his numb hand clutched emptiness. The big earth-filled flowerpot he had knocked over crashed against the concrete and shattered noisily in the same moment that Ken felt his whole body jar with the impact of his fall.

Dimly Ken heard a startled shout from Sandy, and just as dimly he heard footsteps thudding inside the house. He tried to get to his feet, tried to regain the breath that had been driven from his lungs.

"Run!" he croaked. "Run, Sandy!" The brief warning was all he could manage before the door slammed open, a figure burst through onto the porch, and a blaze of light shone down on him.

"Stay where you are! Don't move!" The resonant voice that Ken remembered so well was trying to express the normal surprise of a startled householder, but behind it Ken could sense Smith's rage and fear.

And when Ken twisted around to look up at the figure towering above him, and pointing the swivel-headed flashlight down into his face, he could see the bulge of a gun in Smith's jacket pocket.

Only one thought was clear in Ken's mind: to stall Smith as long as possible, to give Sandy a chance to get away. But even as he sought for words that would satisfy Smith, for a few moments at least, he knew Sandy would never take advantage of them.

"Talk!" The bulge in Smith's pocket thrust menacingly outward. "Who are you? What are you doing here? Talk, I tell you!"

With a crash that shook the house another flowerpot shattered against the wall behind Smith, having just missed the man's head. Shards of pottery and lumps of dried earth showered down on the porch floor. Smith spun around on the balls of his feet, the beam of his light piercing the darkness. And now his gun was in the open, pointing out and over Ken's body.

Ken rolled over-rolled toward the man, hands outthrust. For a fraction of a second he caught a glimpse of Sandy outlined in the glare, right arm back for another throw.

Then Ken's two hands closed around Smith's left ankle, just as Smith ducked to avoid the missile Sandy flung at his head. Ken pulled hard.

Smith lurched sideways, trying to kick loose the fingers clamped around his ankle. The hand that held the gun flew high, in a wild effort to restore his balance. And then he fell backward and landed, spread-eagled, on his back on the porch floor.

Sandy's two hundred pounds surged forward and hurtled through the air in a long dive that carried him over Ken's still prone body to land on top of Smith with a thud that shook the porch. His two huge hands reached toward the gun still clutched in Smith's fingers and closed tightly around the man's wrist.

Then Sandy rolled away, gripping Smith's wrist and twisting to get it over his shoulder. Heaving with all his strength, he jerked Smith's body off the floor and through the air. Breath whooshed out of the man as he landed on Sandy's far side, flashlight clattering in one direction, gun flying off into the darkness.

Instantly Sandy was on his knees, Smith's wrist still held in the vise of his powerful hands. Before Smith could stir, he had turned the man over on his face and brought the trapped wrist up behind his back in a punishing lock.

"Now don't *you* move!" he gasped. "Ken!" he shouted, raising his voice. "You all right?"

Ken was on his feet, willing himself to stand erect on rubbery legs. "Sure," he said. "Are you?" He had found the flashlight in his pocket and now he turned it on Sandy and his captive.

For answer, Sandy gave him a brief tight grin and then said, "And I expect to be even better." He got off Smith's back, still holding the locked arm, and as he rose to his feet forced the other to rise too. "Come on!" Sandy prodded him. "Get inside and show us where Timothy is."

"Timothy? I don't know what you're talking about." Smith's voice itself betrayed the feeble lie. Now it had lost its carefully schooled resonance. It was thin and harsh with fury and panic.

"Get inside," Sandy repeated disgustedly.

Ken pointed the way with his flashlight and Sandy thrust the man ahead of him. Ken followed, closing the door after he had stooped momentarily to retrieve Smith's light from the porch floor. A few steps along the hall brought them to the kitchen door opening off to the left, and Sandy pushed Smith through.

The first thing Ken's light fell on in the room was an open suitcase

beneath the window through which he and Sandy had first sighted the kidnapper. Clothes were crammed into one side of it. The other was filled with stacks of currency.

"The ransom," Ken told Sandy, walking close enough to the bag to see that each neatly bound package was topped with a twenty-dollar bill. They represented another example of Smith's careful planning, Ken thought automatically. Smith had undoubtedly insisted that the ransom be paid in bills of that denomination, rather than in fifties or in hundreds, so that when he spent the money it would arouse no curiosity.

The sound of footsteps in the hall made Ken spin around.

"Hold still-all of you! I've got you covered!" The voice from the doorway was accompanied by a new beam of light pouring into the room.

It was a moment before Ken's own light lifted above it to illuminate the speaker. "Brooks!" he said then, and Sandy's voice repeated the name simultaneously.

Ken started eagerly toward the man.

"Stay where you are!" the young lawyer ordered. "One move from any of you and I'll shoot!"

Suddenly Ken felt a wild desire to shout with laughter. The mistake Brooks was making-identifying Sandy and himself as criminals too-seemed too ridiculous to deserve explanation. But he realized that the man was keyed up to a point where he might use his gun before he understood the reason for amusement.

So Ken said instead, as calmly as he could, "We're glad you turned up, Mr. Brooks. You're right about one of us. That man's the kidnapper. But don't you recognize us? We're Holt and Allen of Global News."

"I recognize you all right," Brooks said loudly.

"And I guess you think you were pretty smart, posing as reporters. But now I'm going to turn you all in to the police."

"Hey!" Sandy said. "What is this? We've just caught this guy! Don't you get it? And we did it without any help from you and Walsh, either. And now you stand there acting as if we're his confederates. You must be crazy!"

"Crazy?" Suddenly Brooks looked puzzled. "You mean you have nothing to do with this man-that you just caught him? Just you two?"

"You heard us!" Sandy snapped. "But if you don't believe us-"

"Now wait a minute," Brooks broke in. His gun was still steady in his hand but a note of apology had come into his voice. "You can't blame me for being suspicious. I track down the kidnapper-and find you three all here together. What would you expect me to think?"

"I'd expect you to believe us," Sandy said hotly. "After all, what do

you think I'm doing, holding this character in a hammer lock? Dancing with him?"

"It's just that your story sounds so thin," Brooks pointed out. "I don't want to stand here accusing you of this terrible crime if you're just doing your duty as citizens, the way I've been trying to do mine. But tell me, how'd you find him?"

"We trailed him here," Ken explained. "He left footprints on the beach, from the spot where he landed in the dinghy. As we figure it, he set the *Heron* afire and then left the boat before the blaze really got started. But if you still don't believe us," he added, "let's find Timothy-he must be somewhere here in this house-and then get to the State Police, all of us."

Brooks smiled. "I do believe you now," he said, "because that's just how I got here myself. I joined the search party about an hour ago-phoned for permission right after Walsh had that last conversation with the police. I was assigned to the Ice Creek area and I came upon the dinghy too. And the footprints. But I saw three pairs of them. So when I saw the three of you here, I naturally assumed that you were in this together. But I guess you wouldn't have told me this stuff about the dinghy if you'd helped to plan it."

He let out his breath. "I feel better," he said. "Must admit I wasn't any too sure of myself, coming in here thinking I was facing three of you. Now let's find the boy and get out of here, shall we?" He strode suddenly close to Smith and glared at him. "Where is he?" he demanded.

Smith glared back. "I don't know what you're talking about. But if these two crazy kids are so sure somebody's hidden here in the house, why don't they go look for him? Then maybe when they don't find him--"

Brooks cut in on him. "We're wasting time," he told the boys. "Go ahead-you two search the house. And don't worry. I'll keep the gun on him while you're gone."

Sandy released his grip and Brooks motioned Smith briskly over against the wall. The young lawyer was standing planted squarely in front of the man, gun aimed carefully at his chest, as Ken and Sandy hurried toward the hall.

They flashed their lights ahead of them and Ken opened the first door they came to. It led into a small room that was obviously used as a dining room.

"Not here," Sandy muttered, turning back toward the door.

Ken gripped his arm tightly and spoke against his ear in a barely audible whisper. "Go on and search-make a lot of noise, as if there were two of us. But if you hear trouble-come fast! I'm going outside. Got a hunch."

Then Ken left Sandy's side and slipped quietly down the hall to the front door. Sandy took a step after him, frowning. Ken glanced over his shoulder, saw him, and waved him urgently back. Then he quietly opened the front door and stepped outside, permitting Sandy no time to argue.

Sandy's expression was grim, but he did as Ken had asked. He crossed the hall at a noisy clump, glanced into the other room on that floor, found it empty, and just as noisily started clumping up the stairs. At the top of the flight he rattled a doorknob, flung open the door, and flashed his light inside.

An instant later he gasped, "Tim!"

There were two figures huddled together on the floor against the room's chief piece of furniture, a bed. One was a middle-aged woman, the other a young boy. Their hands were tied together behind their backs, and their ankles were securely bound. They looked up at Sandy helplessly over the gags that choked their mouths.

"Tim!" Sandy said again, and moved toward them.

He was halfway across the room when he heard a heavy thud on the floor below, and a second later, the frantic pounding of feet down the hall toward the front door.

Sandy said, "I'll be back!" He spun on his heel as he spoke and plunged for the stairs.

CHAPTER XIV

TRAPPED BY THE BRAMBLES

“Ken! I’m coming!” Sandy’s shout echoed through the house as he reached the top of the flight and aimed his flashlight into the darkness below.

The beam illuminated Smith’s fleeing figure, suitcase clutched in one hand, other hand outstretched for the knob of the front door.

Sandy hurled himself down the stairs.

But he was still midway between the two floors when Smith jerked the door open and shot across the threshold.

Sandy saw the foot-Ken’s foot-materializing suddenly out of the blackness to one side of the door, But Smith’s eyes were focused high above it. And when the foot inserted itself between his legs, catching his left ankle, the man was totally unprepared for the event.

Like a plane taking off, Smith soared upward, arcing high in a slow somersault. Sandy reached the front door in time to throw his flashlight’s glow on a blur of gyrating arms and legs culminating in Smith’s crash landing on the sand several feet in front of the doorway.

Ken, sprinting toward his victim, called to Sandy as he ran. “Watch Brooks! He’s one of the gang!”

For an instant Sandy stood stock-still, so confused by the events of the past few minutes that he couldn’t take in the message of Ken’s words. And then the thought registered. Ken had told him that Brooks was Smith’s confederate!

Even as Sandy was wondering dazedly how Ken had arrived at that amazing conclusion, he was dashing back down the hall toward the kitchen.

The lawyer was lying on the floor, eyes closed. He blinked his eyes as Sandy flashed the light on him, half sat up, and rubbed at his chin.

“He knocked me out!” he said. “He got away!”

He sounded convincing, but Sandy strode across the room and stood above him. “No, he didn’t get away,” he said deliberately. “Ken caught him.”

“Caught him!” Startled eyes flashed up to Sandy’s. “Caught him!” Brooks repeated on a higher note. And suddenly he sprang to his feet, outspread fingers clawing for Sandy’s throat.

Sandy was too fast for him. His long arm shot out. His palm thrust against Brooks’ chest before the lawyer’s hand reached its goal, and with a mighty thrust he drove the man down again, flat on his back on the floor. Then Sandy leaped forward and pinned the man in place by sitting astride his chest.

Instantly Brooks' right fist drove up at the redhead's chin. Sandy grabbed for it, missed, and felt the fist catch him viciously, rock him back on his perch, and almost unseat him. When he threw himself forward again, Brooks' other hand aimed at his eyes.

Sandy, rolling sideways to avoid the raking fingers, found himself on the floor. He had dropped his flashlight. It lay under the table now, its flat beam casting a pool of radiance toward the door, but leaving the rest of the room in shadow. Still groggy from the sudden and violent attack, Sandy staggered to his feet, chest heaving. Brooks had apparently disappeared.

And then Sandy saw the anger-crazed figure halfway across the room. He was holding a chair high above his head, ready to hurl.

Sandy ducked. The chair sailed past him and crashed against the window, with a splintering of wood and shattering of glass. The noise was still reverberating in the air when Sandy leaped, head turned to one side, shoulder driving for Brooks' solar plexus. His weight carried the man backward against the wall with a resounding thud.

Sandy, toppled against him, held the lawyer to the wall with one hand while he hauled himself upright. Then the other hand drew back, flashed forward, and landed solidly on Brooks' chin. The man's eyes glazed and he became a dead weight under Sandy's hand, sliding slowly downward to the floor.

Sandy let him slump. He was gulping air back into his straining lungs.

"Sandy!" Ken's bent figure appeared in the doorway, weighted down by Smith's unconscious body held over his back in a fireman's carry. "You O.K.?"

Sandy got to his side in time to help Ken lower the man to the floor.

"No bones broken-if that's what you mean," Sandy said, straightening slowly. Ken, after a brief glance at Brooks, was now sinking, breathless, onto the one still upright chair. "But mentally," Sandy added, pausing for a long, shuddering breath, "mentally I'm a wreck. What happened? What tipped you off that Brooks was in on it-if he really was? I still can't believe it."

"Elementary, my dear Watson." Ken's words came out in short gasps, as he too fought for breath. "Look at his clothes. Neat, aren't they?"

Sandy looked at Brooks' now rumpled suit and back at Ken again. Ken answered the unspoken question in his eyes.

"No burrs, I mean. And look at ours." Ken's hand gestured limply at the dozens of burrs still clinging to Sandy's trousers and his own. "We got 'em coming through that patch of brambles between the beach and the house. Brooks says he came the same way we did, up

from the beach. Impossible-or he'd be covered with burrs too."

"Oh," Sandy said flatly. Then he repeated it more loudly. "Oh! You mean Brooks could get here by another route because he knew all along where Smith was?"

"Right. And knew he had to get us out of the room so he could pretend to let Smith 'escape.'"

They both drew their first long full breath. And in the same instant their eyes met.

"Timothy-?" Ken began.

"Upstairs-come on!" Sandy said simultaneously. As they headed for the hall he raised his voice and shouted, "We're coming, Tim! We're coming!"

The next half-hour was never very clear in the boys' memories, but Ken would never forget his first sight of the two figures huddled on the floor by the bed. As his fingers ripped away the piece of woolen blanket that had been wadded into a gag, and tore off the strips of blanketing that bound the youngster's thin ankles and small frail wrists, Ken kept up a low-voiced murmur of "Good boy, Tim! Everything's all right now. It's all over."

Sandy had the governess released by the time Timothy was free, but neither of the captives could speak for a moment. When they could articulate around dry swollen tongues, Timothy's first whispered words were, "I knew you'd come!" and a moment later the governess was murmuring, "Timothy said you'd come. And you did-you did! Thank heaven!"

"We couldn't have managed it without Timothy's signal," Ken said gruffly, and looked away from the sudden tremulous smile on the boy's white pinched face. Then Ken was thrusting the strips of blanketing at Sandy, who hurried downstairs again to use them on the two unconscious men in the kitchen, while Ken helped Timothy Crandall and his governess to their numbed and icy feet, and supported their first trembling steps.

It was some twenty minutes later when the Global News sedan, with Timothy and his governess beside Ken in the front seat, and Sandy with their prisoners in the back, drew up alongside the police car in which Trooper Waski had maintained his vigil. Brooks' car, parked beside theirs near the beach, had been left behind.

Waski's utter amazement lasted only a split second. Then he was efficiently snapping handcuffs on Brooks and Smith. Brooks was still unconscious, but Smith was already aware of his situation-enough aware of it to launch into a monologue about Brooks. "He got me into this. I had no idea what it was all about-no idea at all," he kept insisting. "Keep it quiet," Waski ordered him. "You'll have plenty of time to talk later." The next words he spoke, after transferring the two

men to the police car parked on the shoulder of the road, were into his police transmitter. And three seconds later he was reporting Captain Hotchner's reply to his message.

"He says to drive them straight to Crag's End," he told Ken and Sandy. "He'll be in touch with you there. And he's phoning ahead to the house so they'll be ready for you." He grinned reassuringly at Timothy. "Guess you'll be pretty glad to get home, won't you, young man?"

Timothy eyed him over the loose folds of Ken's heavy leather jacket, wrapped over his overcoat. His mouth was full of chocolate. And beside him, his governess, Miss Alice, was eating chocolate too. "Yes, it would be a fine idea," she'd said, when Sandy diffidently offered the candy, not sure whether it would be welcome or not. "The sugar content," she had explained calmly, "will help restore our energy."

Now Timothy swallowed politely before he answered the trooper's question. "I guess I'll be glad," he said. "But I'm glad I had the adventure too. You see, I'm going to be a detective too when I grow up, just like Ken and Sandy."

"Yes. Yes, I see." Trooper Waski blinked. Then he backed away from the car and waved them on. "Well, you'd better get going. I'll look after the gentlemen over there." He was striding toward his own car, and his two prisoners, as Ken released the brake and headed for Crag's End.

The gates stood wide when they turned into the graveled drive. Hawkins was waiting there for them. At the door of the house, when they drove up, Walsh was standing with a doctor on one side of him and the whole Crandall estate staff on the other. Only the doctor's insistence got them all swiftly into the house, and Timothy and Miss Alice hustled upstairs for hot baths and hot broth, over the servants' flurried attempts to be helpful and the lawyer's repeated "But are you all right? Are you, Timothy? Are you, Miss Alice?"

"How will they know whether they're all right or not until they've had a chance to pull themselves together?" the doctor had snapped, and then he had disappeared after his patients. "See that those two get warm and get something to eat," he called over his shoulder to Walsh. And suddenly Ken and Sandy found themselves alone with the lawyer in a big book-lined study.

Ken immediately handed over the suitcase stuffed with bills which he had been carrying. "The ransom," he explained.

Walsh thanked him, but almost absent-mindedly. "It's getting Timothy back safe that matters most," he said, "and if you two are responsible for that I want you to know how grateful we are." He herded them fussily toward a crackling fire, handed them sandwiches

from a plate on the table, and poured them cups of coffee from a steaming pot beside it. "No point in my trying to tell you how we all feel about what you've done," he rushed on. "I wouldn't know how-just wouldn't be able to. When Brooks gets back he'll do a better job of it-much better than I could do."

Ken and Sandy wolfed half a sandwich each, and took a long hot swallow of coffee, before they even met each other's eyes. Then Sandy's glance said, "Go on. You've got to tell him."

"Mr. Walsh," Ken said slowly, "I'm afraid Brooks won't get back."

"Won't?" The lawyer stared at him uncomprehendingly. "You mean he's been hurt?"

"No." Ken hesitated. "You see-"

"But I don't see!" Walsh's long vigil had made him more nervous, more testy than ever. "What are you trying to say?"

"Brooks was involved in the kidnapping plot," Ken said quickly, eager to get it over. "He was a confederate of the man who took the Crandall chauffeur's place-the man who did the actual job of carrying Timothy and his governess off."

Walsh's face had gone red with fury. "Nonsense, young man! And vicious nonsense! Just because you've done the Crandall family a good turn doesn't give you the right to-"

"But it's not nonsense!" Sandy's interruption was almost a shout, as his pent-up anger over Walsh's misguided caution of the past two days overcame the respect he normally felt for men of the lawyer's years and profession. "You've been using that word ever since Timothy was kidnaped, and other people wanted to do something to rescue him," Sandy rushed on. "But is it nonsense to think the kidnapping couldn't have been pulled off without help from somebody on the inside? Is it nonsense that you were maneuvered into staying away from Timothy when he landed at the airport-that you never even got a chance to see the phony Malloy close enough to realize he was phony? Why, the man who had Timothy and Miss Alice tied up, who would have left them alone to freeze or starve to death, *told* us Brooks planned the whole thing! Is that nonsense? Is-"

But Sandy stopped his tirade as abruptly as he had begun. The lawyer was feeling behind himself for a chair, sinking weakly into it. His face had gone deathly pale. His jaw hung slack. "Brooks!" he mumbled. "Brooks!"

The doctor came into the room at that moment and Ken crossed to him quickly. "We've just given Mr. Walsh a bad shock," he said. "We had to tell him that his partner, Brooks, was involved in this thing. I'm afraid-"

Sandy had joined them by then. "I didn't mean to yell at him," he said.

But the doctor was ignoring him. "Brooks," he repeated quietly. "I see. Yes, that would be hard for him to take. But I'll look after him. Right now, I want you two to go upstairs and see Timothy for a moment. He won't forgive me if he goes to sleep without speaking to you again-and I've given him and Miss Alice both some pills that will send them off in a few minutes. Go along now. His door's at the head of the stairs."

Ken paused long enough to ask, "Are they going to be all right?"

"Those two? Oh, yes, they're tougher than they look." The doctor smiled briefly and then headed across the room toward the man in the big chair, whose face was now buried in his hands.

Timothy looked smaller than ever propped up against several pillows in a big bed, with a huge tray across his knees. A similar tray stood on a table nearby and Miss Alice sat in a chair behind it. Both were spooning up steaming broth when the boys entered, but both stopped eating to greet them.

"I hope they've given you something to eat too," Miss Alice said. "We'll have to arrange a royal feast for them soon, won't we, Timothy?"

The boy's eyes were bright above cheeks that now had a little color. He nodded vigorously. "A big feast. But right now we have to discuss the case. Don't we, Ken? Don't we, Sandy? I have to tell them how I sent the signal with the mirror, and everything."

"Yes, you have to tell us all about it," Ken agreed. "And Sandy will take some pictures of you at the same time. O.K.?"

"For the newspapers? Oh, yes, please!"

Miss Alice was less enthusiastic, but she pulled the collar of a fluffy white robe up closer about her face and said, "Well, I guess it's all right. After all, one doesn't get kidnaped every day, does one?"

Timothy did his best to hold still while Sandy made half a dozen shots with the Global News camera he had brought in from the car. But his overexcited voice bubbled steadily on.

"You see, I thought and thought until I thought up an idea-just like you do when you're being detectives," he said. "So we found a long stick-"

"A piece of molding that we pulled loose from around the baseboard," Miss Alice murmured.

"-and I put the mirror from Miss Alice's pocket-book on the end of the stick," Timothy went on.

"How did you fasten it?" Ken asked.

Timothy grinned suddenly at his governess. "With chewing gum. Miss Alice doesn't like me to chew gum, but the lady in the airplane gave me some and I kept it in my pocket. And it was a good thing I did, wasn't it?"

“Very good,” Miss Alice agreed, smiling. “It was his own idea to try to catch the eye of someone on the street with flashes from the mirror,” she added to Ken and Sandy. “But suddenly he caught sight of you two through the glass.”

“I knew all along you’d find us,” Timothy said for the twentieth time. “I wasn’t a bit surprised to see you-to see Sandy’s red hair with the light on it. So then I broke the window with the stick and threw down the tiger.”

Ken pulled the little grinning tiger out of his pocket. “It really is a good-luck charm, Timothy,” he said. “Anyway, it was lucky for us.”

“No-for me,” Timothy corrected him. “Only it isn’t really, you know. Believing in good-luck charms is only a super-a-?” He looked to his governess for help.

“Superstition,” she supplied.

Timothy nodded. “Only make-believe,” he explained in his own words. “You saved us because you’re good detectives. And-”

Ken cut in. “And now tell us about how it all began, Timothy, so we can get it straight in our story.” He had noticed Timothy’s quickly suppressed yawn and he wanted to check on the deductions he and Sandy had made about the getaway from the airport. “Did you go straight to the old house where you were when you first saw us?”

Timothy shook his head. “Our car stopped on the way and two other men in a green car-they had handkerchiefs tied around their faces-came up to us and tied up our mouths and our hands, and made us get down on the floor in the back seat of the green car, and they covered us with an old blanket. Then when we got out we were at that old house. And they made us walk up a lot of stairs and-” He yawned again, enormously, and rubbed at his eyes.

Miss Alice got up, took the tray from his lap, and set it on the table beside her own. “Timothy looks very sleepy,” she said apologetically, “and suddenly I feel extremely sleepy myself. I’m afraid-” She too yawned.

Ken got up. “We’ll get along,” he said quickly.

“But will you come see me again?” Timothy asked, holding his eyes open by sheer force of will. “Because I have to learn how to be a real detective and you have to help me. And ...” His eyes closed and his voice dwindled away.

“We’ll come. Tell him, please,” Ken said to Miss Alice.

She nodded, smiling. “We’ll look for you-both of us.”

The doctor was in the hall when they closed the door. “Asleep?” he asked.

Ken nodded. “How is Mr. Walsh?” Sandy asked.

“He’ll be all right after he’s had a good rest. This has been a strain on him, far too much of a strain for a man of his temperament. Thank

heaven-or thanks to you two, I guess I should say-it's all over now for everybody. Now is there anything I can do for you?"

"We'd like to use the phone," Ken said.

"Of course, of course. There's one in the study, at the desk in the corner. Help yourselves." The doctor's eyes twinkled. "If you're going to phone in a story on the events of the night, I suppose it's just as well I got Walsh out of here. That might prove too much for him to take on top of everything else."

They walked into the study to find a man there-a man whose resemblance to the phony chauffeur was astounding. Beside him was a young boy about Timothy's age and size.

"You must be Malloy," Ken said, after staring a moment.

"That's right," the man said quietly in a voice still bearing traces of an Irish brogue. "I wanted to thank you--"

"How did they manage to get their hands on you?" Sandy cut in swiftly.

Malloy smiled sheepishly. "This chap Jones-or whatever his name really is-seemed like a nice lad when I met him at the bowling alley. So when I saw him standing beside his car while I was on my way to the airport, and he hailed me, I thought he'd had some engine trouble and I stopped." Malloy shrugged. "I never had a chance. Another man appeared and stuck a gun in my ribs. Then I felt the jab of a hypodermic needle and that's the last I knew until I woke up in a hospital."

"And then Hawkins and Brooks took you away, didn't they?" Ken asked.

Malloy nodded again. "I was pretty groggy, but with Mr. Brooks' help I made it out to the car." His eyes narrowed. "Is it true that Mr. Brooks was part of the gang?"

"I'm afraid so," Ken said. He pointed to the boy. "Is he the one who took Tim's place as a measles patient?"

Malloy pushed the boy forward. "That's right. This is young Pat Malloy, my son. Pat, say hello to the men who saved Tim and Miss Alice."

The boy offered his hand shyly to both Ken and Sandy.

"Now, off to bed with you," Malloy said. He turned back to the boys. "I wish I knew how to thank--"

"No thanks are necessary," Sandy said firmly. "And if you'll excuse us, we'll make a phone call."

Malloy pointed, as he turned to leave. "The phone's right there."

"Thank you," Sandy said, as Ken walked quickly across the room.

A few seconds later Ken was talking to Granger.

"Finally!" Granger sputtered. "I got word from your father nearly half an hour ago that you two had turned the trick and that I'd be

hearing from you. Where've you been? Never mind-don't bother to answer. Wait until I get a rewrite man on another phone. All right, go ahead now. I want to hear this too."

Ken gave him as much of the story as they knew, beginning with his and Sandy's assignment to the Oak Beach area and concluding with Timothy's own words and the doctor's verdict that both the boy and his governess had withstood the rigors of their adventure.

"Good stuff, good stuff!" Granger muttered at intervals.

Ken grinned. From Granger that was praise indeed. When he finished Ken said, "And that's all we know. Who Smith really is, or-" Granger interrupted. "I've got that from your father. He-"

"Hold it a minute," Ken told him, and motioned Sandy close enough so that he could hear too. "O.K. Tell us about it."

"Smith is a chap named Caudry," Granger explained. "Went to college with Brooks. Now a third-rate actor. He says Brooks needed money-he'd been speculating wildly-and dreamed up this kidnapping scheme when he found out the boy was going to come home. Smith-or Caudry-says Brooks planned the entire thing. Neither the boy nor the governess were to be harmed. They were to be left in the Galan Street house overnight until a letter arrived the next morning telling Walsh where to pick them up. Smith was to mail the letter on his way to pick up the ransom. Brooks worked out the double cross too. He and Smith were going to split fifty-fifty and leave the other two hirelings out in the cold." Granger laughed. "And I mean cold, too. They're probably still somewhere in Connecticut waiting for the boat to land."

"Didn't Smith tell the police where they were waiting?" Ken asked.

"Not yet," Granger said. "Smith suddenly had an attack of honor among thieves and he won't say. Anyway, this was the original plan: Smith had this boat hidden in Ice Creek. When he left the Galan Street house he was to pick up the ransom, drive to the boat, and abandon the car there to make it look as if he really went down with the boat. He was to get the boat out in the Sound, head it for Connecticut, and set a time bomb. Then he was to row ashore in the dinghy. Brooks was to pick him up at that cottage-after everybody thought Smith had drowned -and take him to New York. His disguises were supposed to protect him should the other two ever chance to see him again. When you two showed up in the old house he made a quick change of plans. He took his victims with him when he picked up the ransom and then dropped them off at the cottage before he went aboard the boat. He changed the letter, of course, to tell Walsh where the boy and the governess would be because he felt sure he'd be out of the cottage and safe in New York long before the letter is delivered tomorrow morning. Hotchner's men found the green car where the boat had been anchored, by the way," Granger added.

“Seems like a stupid thing to do,” Sandy said, “to leave us in the Galan Street house, knowing we’d get out sooner or later.”

“Smith was sure you had no idea there had been a kidnapping. He thought you just stumbled on the place accidentally. So he figured that even if you got out, you couldn’t do him any harm. He made a mistake about the dinghy, too” Granger added. “Smith was certain it would drift off eastward with the tide, but the wind kept blowing it back to shore and he couldn’t get rid of it. And that’s how you two lucky snoops came to spot it.”

“Lucky!” Sandy snorted. “It was pure deduction.”

“So Brooks was the brains,” Ken said.

“Yes,” Granger replied. “He planned the entire business. He tipped off the press so that the airport would be jammed with reporters and Walsh would never get a chance to get close to the fake chauffeur. And it was Brooks who suggested to Walsh that the uncle be kept in Florida, instead of coming up to meet the boy. Smith, of course, did most of the actual work. He arranged for the Galan Street house, arranged for one of his hirelings to take pictures of Malloy, made himself up to look like the chauffeur, and supervised the capture of the real Malloy.” Granger paused. “Got it straight?”

“More or less,” Ken said. “Too bad about not catching the other two, though.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Granger said with mock solicitude. “You don’t have to handle that tonight. You can just sit back and rest on your laurels for a while.”

“We will,” Ken assured him. “Permanently, I think. We’re training a new man to take our place-Timothy Crandall.”

Granger’s amused snort sounded over the wire. “Good for him. Now I’ll never have to run another story about some fantastic mystery solved by those two great minds, Holt and Allen. Oh, yes, one more thing,” he added. “Your father says to tell you to stay there. Hotchner will get him there any minute, so he can go home with you in the Global car. Just don’t forget to bring some pictures back with you when you come to town-good ones, this time.”

“And don’t you forget I’ll expect a decent price for them,” Sandy said into the phone before Ken hung up.

A moment later the redhead was back at the plate of sandwiches near the fireplace. “I hope Granger was wrong with that prophecy of ‘any minute,’” he said. “I could use at least half an hour with these before we’re dragged away.”

But Granger was right on that score. Richard Holt and Captain Hotchner arrived less than five minutes later. It was only Granger’s first prophecy that would fail to come true, as he himself would be glad to admit when not long afterward Ken and Sandy found

themselves involved in the solution of another mystery as strange as the kidnapping of Timothy Crandall-*The Mystery of the Vanishing Magician*.

THE END

THE MYSTERY OF THE GRINNING TIGER

A KEN HOLT Mystery, No. 11

by BRUCE CAMPBELL